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August 14, 2014

## Moving from a Culture of Death to a Culture of Life

**A mere change in technologies will not suffice to avert climate change.**

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

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On September 21, concerned citizens from all across the United States, and from many other lands, will be converging on New York City for the People's Climate March, billed to be the biggest climate march in history. The immediate occasion for the march is the gathering of world leaders at the United Nations for a summit being convened by the UN Secretary General on the climate crisis. The march's purpose is to tell global leaders that the time for denial and delay is over, that we have to act now if we're going to secure the world against the ravages of climate change. The annual conference of the parties (COP) climate meetings have repeatedly turned out to be cop-outs, carnivals of deception launched with grand rhetoric, but ending in stalemates or hollow promises. People are ready to march in order to show that this won't do. We must recognize that climate disruption is real, that the consequences of inaction will be catastrophic, and that the need for swift and effective action is overwhelming. Preserving the crucial life-support systems of planet Earth simply won't be possible with the tiny baby steps that have so far been taken. If we're going to emerge intact, what we need at minimum are binding and enforceable commitments to steep cuts in carbon

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emissions coupled with a mass-scale transition to renewable sources of energy.

However, while greater efficiency and clean energy policies are clearly essential in combating climate disruption, a long-term solution must go deeper than the implementation of new technologies and the adoption of such pragmatic measures as cap-and-trade or a carbon tax. The climate instability we are facing today is symptomatic of a deeper malady, a cancer spreading through the inner organs of global civilization. The extreme weather events we have experienced come to us as a wake-up call demanding that we treat the underlying causes. For any treatment to succeed, we must closely examine the paradigm that underlies our industrial-commercial-financial economy, for it is this model that lies at the root of the crisis. Since this paradigm—this particular constellation of views and values—has acquired a global reach that now extends from New York and London to Delhi, Seoul, and Beijing, the transformations needed must be equally global.

The dominant political and economic elites claim that this system is beyond doubt or questioning, that it is as immutable as the laws of physics. They confront us with the maxim, "There is no alternative." Yet when it is carefully scrutinized, this system reveals itself to be sustained by a matrix of ideas and values that have been shaped and imposed by powerful vested interests. Examination shows, moreover, that these ideas and values are the hidden forces behind the climate crisis. They are the drivers behind more frequent and severe floods, droughts, and heat waves, behind more acidic oceans, collapsing ice sheets, and vanishing glaciers. Day by day this model is dragging human civilization down a treacherous slope threatening planetary suicide.

The distinctive mark of this paradigm—which is none other than the paradigm of corporate capitalism—is the locating of all value in monetary wealth. Human value, labor value, natural value all translate into financial value, and the last is the only value to which the paradigm ascribes ultimacy. All other values must submit to the reign of monetary wealth in the form of increased profits and greater returns on investments. The model posits the goal of the economy to be continuous growth, based on the madcap premise of infinite growth on a finite planet.

The cogency of this way of thinking depends on a process of objectification, which means that it treats everything—people, animals, and trees, rivers, land, and mountains—as *objects* to be utilized to generate financial gain for corporations, their executives, and their shareholders. This logic of objectification and its accompanying scheme of values entail policies aimed at the unrestrained domination and subjugation of nature. The system depends on the ruthless extraction of natural resources to generate energy and produce commodities for sale in the market. It thereby turns nature's bounty into a plurality of goods, often inessential and frivolous goods, leaving behind mountains of waste and pollution. Yet those in the seats of power refuse to take responsibility for the wreckage they leave behind. Instead, they push the clean-up job on to governments by a process shrewdly called externalization, with the bill to be met by public funding.

The corporate paradigm treats people just as callously as it treats stones, trees, and soil. It pushes indigenous peoples off their lands and treats labor as an abstract variable, reducing real human beings to figures in a database. Mega-transnationals squeeze workers for the economic value they can generate while refusing to provide them with adequate rights and benefits—considerations that would cut into their profit margins and thus make the firms less "competitive" in the global marketplace. Then, when the labor of the workers is no longer needed, the company casts them aside to fend for themselves with the same unconcern as we might cast aside an empty plastic bottle.

This system flourishes by inciting in people insatiable desires for the consumption of material commodities. Its blueprint is the simple "throughput" sequence by which resources and labor are converted into goods that are converted into monetary wealth and material waste. Rapid model replacement, by which last year's glittering iPad or car or clothing quickly becomes obsolete, is used to increase sales and thereby bolster economic growth. To keep the economy spinning, the system pushes credit programs that turn people into debt-slaves beholden to ravenous financial institutions. Even those pursuing a higher education now court the risk of becoming hapless debtors for life.

All these factors functioning in unison churn out the devastation we see around us, signs of a planet in peril. We're living in a world weighed down by the culture of death, both literally and figuratively. Amid unimaginable luxury, almost 900 million people must endure chronic hunger and malnutrition; easily cured diseases turn fatal; the gap between a super-rich elite and everyone else grows wider and climate disruption claims tens of millions of lives each year. Unless we change direction fast, the final outcome could well be the collapse of human civilization as we know it. Yet we are not without guides, for thinkers from Lewis Mumford to David Korten, James Speth and Gar Alperovitz, have long been pointing the way to a better future. Perhaps it's time to lend them an ear.

To avoid civilizational collapse, we not only need new technologies to reduce carbon emissions but even more fundamentally, a new paradigm, a model for a culture of life that can replace the pernicious culture of death. We need, in brief, an alternative way of understanding the world and an alternative set of values conducive to *a more integral relationship of people with each other, with nature, and with the cosmos.*

This paradigm should be rooted in what I call the "affirmation of subjectivity" to replace the heartless objectifying processes of corporate capitalism. We need a vision that recognizes other people and other life forms as *subjects of experience* possessing intrinsic value. The model should also recognize nature, indeed the cosmos itself, as endowed with a profound subjective dimension, even an inherent intelligence by which it can transform stardust into planets that bring forth a profusion of life forms and mold moist clay into conscious beings with feelings and thoughts and ideals and hopes and the innate capacity to reflect the cosmos back upon itself.

This change in worldview must lead to reverence and respect for the natural world, recognized as our irreplaceable home and nurturing mother. It must acknowledge the finitude of nature, and treat it accordingly, bearing in mind our responsibility to future generations. It should promote solidarity between peoples everywhere based on empathy, respect, and a shared humanity. It must lead to the development of benign "appropriate technologies," the selective utilization of natural resources, and the deployment of renewable sources of energy. It should further endorse an ethic of simplicity, contentment, and restraint to replace the voracious appetite of consumerism. And most deeply of all, it should awaken in us an aspiration toward communion with the cosmos and all living beings, a harmonization between human ideals and the creative capacities of the universe.

We now stand at a crossroads where we must choose between competing worldviews. Depending on our choice, we can move in either of two directions: we can move toward continued devastation and eventual global collapse or we can instead turn toward inner renewal and healthier relationships with each other, with the earth, and with the cosmos. As climate change accelerates, the choice before us is being thrown into sharper relief, and thus the need to choose wisely grows ever more urgent.

The obstacles that confront us are formidable. We must face down powerful corporations committed to endless profit, who are ready to pump from the ground billions of barrels of oil per day for years on end, with no concern for the long-term consequences. Instead, they cast up clouds of confusion and depict their opponents as whacky "tree huggers" or dangerous "eco-terrorists." We must push servile politicians to act boldly to protect people, not corporations, though we know that many of them owe their secure positions to the generosity of the carbon industries. And we must see through the blather of the mainstream media that refuse to tackle crucial issues with the seriousness they deserve. Instead we must take up the discipline of educating ourselves and helping others remove the blinders that obstruct their vision.

To prevail against these obstacles, we will need exceptional determination and will power. We must be uncompromising in our insistence on the need to change paradigms—to make the transition to a higher stage in our technological development and in our cultural and spiritual evolution. For our own sakes and for generations to come, we must bluntly repudiate the culture of death and embrace a new vision, a new economy, a new culture committed to the real enhancement of life.

Much damage has already been done. We've delayed too long—much too long—and terrible consequences lie ahead for populations all around the world. The global South and the small island nations will be hit hardest, but no country is exempt from the furies to be unleashed by a destabilized climate. It may not be too late, however, to change course, if we have the faith that we still can avoid the worst. But to succeed we must push hard, holding fast to the conviction "Together we can do it." The People's Climate March will be one powerful demonstration of the strength that comes through unity.

*Join Tricycle and Buddhist communities in New York and beyond as we march to demand climate justice on September 21. Register to get updates, including the meeting location for Buddhist groups, [here](#).*

**The Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi** is a Theravada Buddhist monk and the former editor of the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy, Sri Lanka. His latest publication is a full translation of the *Anguttara Nikaya* (Wisdom Publications, 2012). He founded Buddhist Global Relief in 2008.

*A version of this article first appeared in [Truthout](#). It is adapted here with permission.*

*Image: Chrystal Clarity. Courtesy People's Climate March.*



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Reply by [kammie](#) on September 1, 2014, 6:09 pm

Personally, I don't want to start storming for "climate justice," because that would be emotional violence. Having come of age in the 60s, I've been there, seen that, and it doesn't even slow things down. In this phrase from the article, "The system depends on the ruthless extraction of natural resources to generate energy and produce commodities for sale in the market. It thereby turns nature's bounty into a plurality of goods, often inessential and frivolous goods, leaving behind mountains of waste and pollution. Yet those in the seats of power refuse to take responsibility for the wreckage they leave behind. Instead, they push the clean-up job on to governments by a process shrewdly called externalization, with the bill to be met by public funding," I would change the words: "those in the seats of power" to "those passing the money across the store counter to purchase these inessential and frivolous goods." The rest of that paragraph would remain as true as it is. The place to focus is on the suffering and concomitant unskillfulness of the purchasers. It's the desperation and misplaced hope of the ordinary masses that is driving us to extinction.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 31, 2014, 10:47 pm

Bhikkhu Bodhi's doctrine of Just War claims to be "Buddhist," in the absence of any support in the Pali Canon (as he openly admits) and counter to the Buddha's clear, consistent and pervasive teachings that intentional killing is never wholesome. Starting from this disadvantageous position, how does he propose to legitimize his doctrine of Just War in terms of the Dhamma?

Bhikkhu Bodhi says in this thread: "I really wonder whether the Buddha, if he were alive in 1939-41, would have recommended capitulating to the Nazis rather than opposing them militarily. It is intriguing (as I pointed out in the essay) that we never find in the texts any cases where a conflict of obligations--or a situation with conflicting moral aspects--is brought to the Buddha's attention for advice. *Perhaps* it was because he realized that worldly affairs are just too complex for any simple formulas to work that he did not address situations of moral conflict, not because he regarded the precepts as unconditional absolutes. Thus, contrary to yourself and other radical fundamentalists, I tend to take the moral directives of the texts as general rules, intrinsically valid but not unconditional absolutes. The real world is just too complex and messy for moral absolutes to bear desirable fruit." (italics mine)

I would like to address his argument piece by piece:

- "I really wonder whether the Buddha, if he were alive in 1939-41..." Hmm. I really wonder whether Mahatma Gandhi, if he were alive on Sept. 11, 2001, would have recommended capitulating to Al-Qaeda rather than opposing them militarily. *Perhaps* Gandhi never meant for satyagraha to apply in a complex, post-9/11 world. I really wonder whether Margaret Thatcher, if she had ever considered home ownership in Sub-Saharan Africa, would have recommended privatizing council estates rather than championing socialized housing. *Perhaps* she realized that the the affairs of Sub-Saharan African economies are just too complex for any simple economic formulas to work. *Perhaps*, this game is rather easy and could be used to controvert anyone's views who is not around any more to register an objection. Since Gandhi did weigh in on WWII without carving out an exception, I had to move the ball to 9/11. Otherwise I'm sure I wouldn't have been among the first to gut Gandhi's life's work by invoking Hitler. The point of all of this is that a baseless speculation about what the Buddha *might* have been thinking has been used to attempt to overturn the consistent record of his 45 year teaching career.
- "It is intriguing (as I pointed out in the essay) that we never find in the texts any cases where a conflict of obligations--or a situation with conflicting moral aspects--is brought to the Buddha's attention for advice." This is a bizarre argument as *every* decision, *every single* pointer of Dhamma, is a choice between and among conflicting obligations and values. There's not much more worth saying about this, but somehow this strange statement is also used to attempt to overturn the Buddha's consistent body of teachings.
- "Thus, contrary to yourself [me :-)] and other radical fundamentalists..."  
This loaded label is misapplied to those who refuse to justify lethal force. "Buddhist Fundamentalism" is commonly understood the other way round. For example, the wikipedia entry on fundamentalism states under "Buddhist Fundamentalism:" "In the most recent instances, Buddhist fundamentalism has also targeted other religious and ethnic groups, such as that in Burma. As a Buddhist dominated nation, Burma has seen recent tensions between Muslim minorities and the Buddhist majority, especially during the 2013 Burma anti-Muslim riots..." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundamentalism>. (The irony of this is that Bhikkhu Bodhi's own position advocates creating a religious justification for killing, and he posted with admiration the views of a Sri Lankan monk who justified killing to defend Buddhism (search for "Ven. Piyadassi" on this thread)). But the point is not to decide to whom the label should attach. What I wish to point out is how the label was used in the context of the argument. Bhikkhu Bodhi makes a bold, absolute claim of his own: that the world is too complex for moral absolutes and simple formulas. What does he present in support of this universal law? Nothing but labeling the dissenting viewpoint "radical fundamentalism." Rhetorically, it may be effective, but it only goes that far and no further.
- As an example of a legitimate argument, here is something challenging. Bhikkhu Bodhi says: "The real world is just too complex and messy for moral absolutes to bear desirable fruit." But in this same thread in response to a question of whether he thinks torture can be justified by the Dhamma he posts: "Firstly, torture is prohibited by the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment. Moreover Article 2.2 of the Convention states: "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever,

whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture... Thus, simply on legal grounds (which are in turn based on moral grounds) I could not approve of torture, nor would I ever argue that the Buddha Dhamma can justify torture." It seems when it comes to UN Conventions he has no problem taking "absolutist" stands -- a "radical conventionalist," if you will. ;-)

- Or here's another. Bhikkhu Bodhi says: "The real world is just too complex and messy for moral absolutes to bear desirable fruit." What about laws against apartheid, cannibalism, child molestation, child pornography, genocide, forced genital mutilation, slavery, wars of aggression, and so on? Would he argue against the simplistic, absolute prohibitions of these behaviors? Are they only "general rules, intrinsically valid but not unconditional absolutes?" Are they archaic and in need of nuanced, situational exceptions to reflect the growing complexity of the modern world?

I apologize for the ad hoc approach to dissecting Bhikkhu Bodhi's arguments. It's quite a bit to wade through, sort out, and get to the bottom of things. In my next post I hope to do more of a systematic treatment of how Bhikkhu Bodhi manages to present his own personal political view as the *only* alternative to the "rigid" adherence to the Pali Canon. And in another I will address the baselessness of Bhikkhu Bodhi's claim that the Dhamma needs an update, and question who it is exactly he proposes to perform this "update."

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Reply by [buddhasoup](#) on September 1, 2014, 10:24 am

Once again, One Voice, you, who is such a voice for the Dhamma, ignores the mandates of Right Speech and continues your attacks on Ven. Bodhi's very subtle, nuanced argument regarding the ethics of mindful resistance in the face of genocide or mass killing of innocents. You, who has translated nothing from the Pali texts, who have done nothing to save the life of a starving child, feels free to "call out" one of the most learned, accomplished, and compassionate Bhikkhus of our time. I suppose your campaign has given you a self-imposed sense of power or influence, but your posts to me suggest more of the "peanut gallery" mentality. You made your points many days ago...why the incessant trumpeting of the same material? Have you nothing better to do with your time?

For folks interested in a sober, non-ad hom discussion of this interesting subject, you can find some thoughtful exchanges here at: <http://dhammadawheel.com/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=21602>

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Reply by [Grasshopper](#) on August 27, 2014, 4:14 pm

A note for One Voice:

I have been a Theravada Buddhist all my life, and I must say in your defense that I have never heard any serious Buddhist hold to the opinion that the first precept doesn't apply in all circumstances. Every monastic teacher with whom I've studied, both in America and in Asia, has stressed the point that the five precepts are to be followed even during famine and war. I was surprised to learn of the monks who used the Cakkavati Sihanada Sutta to justify killing by the state. I always thought that the main message of that sutta was that the Dhamma king follows policies so wise that he never needs to use his army. It's bad enough to see that message twisted to justify killing. It's even worse to see someone claim that that twisted message is endorsed by the majority of Theravadin Buddhists.

So, contrary to Ven. Bodhi's comment, you are not a lone voice in the fight to hold to the first precept in all circumstances. And even if you were the lone voice, it wouldn't be a sign that you were wrong. Issues of right and wrong, blameworthy and blameless, are not decided by popular vote.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 30, 2014, 1:54 am

Lone voice or not, this is a simple matter. After all Bhikkhu Bodhi concedes there is no support in the Canon for his position, the Buddha's clear and consistent teachings support mine, and I'm only arguing that we shouldn't invent any justifications to *kill people*. I think I'll sleep all right. Thanks for the bit of support, in any case.

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Reply by [Jayson](#) on August 29, 2014, 10:27 pm

I know Thanissaro Bhikkhu has been quite adamant about the point that any form of intentional killing is unskillful at some level.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 30, 2014, 1:59 am

Do you have a link where Ven. Thanissaro addresses the issue head on?

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Reply by [Jayson](#) on August 30, 2014, 1:18 pm

"Getting the Message" by Thanissaro Bhikkhu:

<http://www.accesstosight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/gettingmessage.html>

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 30, 2014, 7:11 pm

Brilliant. Thanks for that.

"Killing is never skillful. Stealing, lying, and everything else in the first list are never skillful. When asked if there was anything whose killing he approved of, the Buddha answered that there was only one thing: anger. In no recorded instance did he approve of killing any living being at all. When one of his monks went to an executioner and told the man to kill his victims compassionately, with one blow, rather than torturing them, the Buddha expelled the monk from the Sangha, on the grounds that even the recommendation to kill compassionately is still a recommendation to kill — something he would never condone." —Thanissaro Bhikkhu

<http://www.accesstosight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/gettingmessage.html>

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 30, 2014, 11:09 pm

Interesting.

As a vegan, I encounter the "plants are 'living beings' (meaning : sentient beings) argument" on a regular basis, which of course, I consider absurd (laughably so if it weren't for the ignorant and self-interested motive generating the argument). I consider "living beings" to be, at a minimum, what the American philosopher Tom Regan calls "subjects-a-life" (search it). Living beings such as insects, I see as borderline cases, and while I try to avoid harming them, I'm not nearly as strict about it as with beings who clearly have higher level functioning such as emotions and preferences (eg chickens, pigs, dogs, cows).

With the exception, as I've mentioned before in this thread, of self-defense (including self defense against starvation or malnutrition), or defense against blatant tyranny, and only when such defense is likely to be successful, I agree with the prohibition against killing "any living being at all."

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 27, 2014, 10:06 pm

Re Bhikkhu Bodhi's Just War:

From an interview with Aidan Delgado, a conscientious objector in the Iraq War:

"How hard was it to get conscientious objector status?"

'Extremely difficult – there's a huge burden of proof. You have to do an interview with an investigating officer who grills you on your beliefs to find out if you're just making it up or if you've really thought it out. You have to have some kind of documentation. I think one of my strongest points was that I had a lot of military paperwork showing that I had gradually *identified myself as a Buddhist*. I also had a lot of conversations with my superiors where *I talked about being an objector and being a Buddhist*, and they went on the record and said, "Yes, he's talked about it progressively throughout the deployment." That really did a lot to establish my sincerity.'"

[http://www.thewe.cc/contents/more/archive2005/january/concientious\\_objec...](http://www.thewe.cc/contents/more/archive2005/january/concientious_objec...)

Here are the rules for Conscientious Objector status in the U.S.:

"The current statute says that CO claimants must object to "participation in war in any form." This means that in order to qualify as a CO you must be prepared to say honestly that you would refuse to participate in *any war* in which you would reasonably be expected to fight. You cannot say that you could participate in a particular war, but not others. "Selective conscientious objection " uses the "just war" moral teaching and international law to justify some wars and rule out others. Selective conscientious objection is not permitted in the United States."

<http://www.scn.org/IP/sdmcc/co.htm>

Here is Bhikkhu Bodhi from this thread:

"Naturally, there are many shades of opinion about the exact conditions that can justify war, but serious ethical thinkers without preset agendas recognize that the advocacy of *uncompromising pacificism is morally pernicious*." And, "Thus, contrary to yourself and other *radical fundamentalists*, I tend to take the moral directives of the [Buddhist] texts as general rules, intrinsically valid but **not unconditional absolutes**." (emphasis mine)

If we take Bhikkhu Bodhi at his word, he considers this young CO to be a "radical fundamentalist," his beliefs to be "morally pernicious," that he had no legitimate right to claim CO status as a Buddhist, and that the U.S. Army granted it mistakenly. I wonder what Bhikkhu Bodhi would do if an investigative officer called and asked him to render an opinion in a real case. Would the opinion be used to send the young soldier to the front to maim and kill or to be maimed or killed? Or would the facade of tidy U.N. Charters and abstract justifications crumble at the realization that his words have *real consequences*, will wreak havoc on a young person's life, mind, family, and on those who catch his bullets, and their families.

I would be interested to know if Bhikkhu Bodhi denounces Conscientious Objector status on the basis of adherence to the Buddhist religion (as the logic of his doctrine of Just War dictates).

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 26, 2014, 2:43 am

Re Bhikkhu Bodhi's just war:

I thought Bhikkhu Bodhi's antiseptic, academic justification for war (immediately below) made for an interesting contrast with the actual experience of a combat soldier.

"By citing the UN Charter I indicate that the defensive party to the conflict should use only proportionate force, try to avoid civilian casualties, and end combat operations as soon as possible. These are provisions recognized by almost all authorities on international jurisprudence." -  
- Bhikkhu Bodhi

"When the soldier has lost a comrade to this enemy or possibly had his family destroyed by them through bombings or through political atrocities, so frequently the case in World War II, his anger and resentment deepen into hatred. Then the war for him takes on the character of a vendetta. Until he has himself destroyed as many of the enemy as possible, his lust for vengeance can hardly be appeased. I have known soldiers who were avid to exterminate every last one of the enemy, so fierce was their hatred. Such soldiers took great delight in hearing or reading of mass destruction through bombings. Anyone who has known or been a soldier of this kind is aware of how hatred penetrates every fiber of his being. His reason for living is to seek revenge; not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but a tenfold retaliation." -- J. Glenn Gray, who fought in World War II, on the peculiar nature of vengeance in "The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle"

This is the genie Bhikkhu Bodhi wishes to unleash and thinks he can put back in the bottle with his tidy, U.N. legal documents.

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Reply by [buddhasoup](#) on August 26, 2014, 7:44 am

Your argument is a strawman. You are creating vendetta genies, unleashing them, and claiming them to be part of Ven. Bodhi's nuanced argument. Where in Ven. Bodhi's essays did he suggest that vengeance is a factor in an ethical use of necessary force to repel a lethal wrongdoer? Are you suggesting that reasonable and ethical people cannot make rational, ethical, and appropriate decisions re: necessary defensive force in the face of a lethal harm? Nowhere in the Suttas will you find a Buddha that is a fool, or a martyr, or someone that sits by silently and watches violence consume a community. Nowhere does the Buddha, in his exchanges with kings, demand that they lay down their arms and forsake their defenses. If the Buddha had intended that his disciples be self-righteous martyrs in the face of a lethal aggressor, wouldn't he have taught this? Just as the Buddha refused to answer certain questions presented to him, he is silent on the issue of ethical use of defensive force. Therefore, the training rule against taking of life is not an absolute injunction, but a critical factor one must apply in the cultivation of one's own kamma and eventual rebirth.

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Reply by [Jayson](#) on August 26, 2014, 8:04 pm

Yes, it seems true that the Buddha allowed for kings to have standing armies for defense, according to the Chakkavatti-sihanada Sutta. The 'Seeha Senapathi Sutta' from Anguttara Nikaya-5 is interesting to read too. I think this is wise and can be seen as the Buddha's gradual teaching.

Monks cannot intentionally kill (or ask others to kill) or they will be expelled from the sangha: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/vin/sv/bhikkhu-pati.html#pr>

Non-lethal intentional self-defense seems to be a lesser offense: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/vin/sv/bhikkhu-pati.html#pc-74>

There's also the simile of the saw to reflect on: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.021x.than.html>

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 27, 2014, 4:05 pm

The Cakkavattisihananda Sutta ([http://tipitaka.wikia.com/wiki/Cakkavattisihananda\\_Sutta](http://tipitaka.wikia.com/wiki/Cakkavattisihananda_Sutta)) is a fable told by the Buddha which includes traditional story elements. It stresses that a righteous king never conquers or rules by force, but conquers and rules by following and spreading the Dhamma. The fact that there is an "army" in a fable about a king, even though it never fights, and the king conquers by preaching, "Do not take life," should not be deemed sufficient evidence that the Buddha justified armies or war. The story includes the fact that the righteous king had 1,000 sons. Does this mean the Buddha advocated large families? There are many places in the Canon where the Buddha mentions "slaves" incidentally without taking an aside to condemn it. Is this sufficient evidence to create a Buddhist justification for slavery? This is ironic because the "moral of the story" of this sutta is the corrosive effect on the well-being of the population when the King first resorts to state sponsored killing (capital punishment) as an expedient means instead of generosity. The people take the King's actions as an example, the population begins to violate all of the precepts, and the country devolves into chaos.

In the Siha Sutta (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.034.than.html>) the Buddha praises the generosity of a donor who happens to be a general. I don't know if some think that the fact that the Buddha didn't dress down the general for being a soldier signifies something. A lot of Suttas demonstrate the Buddha's restraint when teaching. He did not rail against or try to change the world. He taught people in response to questions, and didn't lecture them without invitation. He also accepted donations from thieves and prostitutes.

A highly relevant sutta is the Yodhajiva Sutta, which demonstrates the Buddha's restraint and directly addresses the issue of killing in war. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn42/sn42.003.than.html>. The Buddha teaches a soldier that the intention to kill people in battle will take him to hell, and that the wrong view that killing in battle is noble (e.g. Just War) will take him to hell or an animal rebirth. The soldier thanks the Buddha for cutting through all the deceptions he'd been told his whole life about how war was noble. If you want to extrapolate from conspicuous omissions in the Canon, this would be one. Not only would this have been the perfect opportunity, but if there were meant to be an exception for, "depending on whether your cause is just," the Buddha's answer here is insufficient to the point of wrong and cruel ... telling the poor fellow he'll go to hell and omitting the terribly important exception that would exonerate and even elevate him. But Bhikkhu Bodhi says in this thread: "Wouldn't we maintain that in this situation military action to stop the aggressor is laudable, even obligatory, and that a soldier's actions can be viewed as morally commendable?"

The Yodhajiva Sutta is also pretty strong counter-evidence to the assertion made time and again by Bhikkhu Bodhi and others in this thread that the Buddha never addressed the issue of war or killing in battle.

I would be interested to see if anyone tries to have an honest go at trying to reconcile Bhikkhu Bodhi's advocacy of a doctrine of Just War to the Dhamma in this case, or whether they agree with me that the view he is promulgating is that which leads to rebirth in hell or the animal womb.

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Reply by [Jayson](#) on August 25, 2014, 1:42 am

I'm not sure I can add much more to this debate that has seemed to drift away from the original topic of this article on climate change.

However, I must say that I very much appreciate Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi for taking the time to clarify his thoughts, address issues and response to questions.

From my reading of the Pali canon, intentional killing is seen as unskillful. There's also not much



support for a Judeo-Christian view of "just" war. I also understand the orthodox Theravadan view and the dangers of the "slippery slope." Is it best to seek a non-violent solution to violent provocation? Yes. Do the vinaya rules call for a monk to not recommend killing, suicide or help arrange a murder? Yes, that is true as well. Looking at specific passages that I can recall, there is the story of when the Buddha stops a war and the Buddha tells a soldier of the dangers of being reborn in a hell realm if he kills with hatred.

However...

Is killing sometimes necessary as is being suggested? Perhaps. For a lay person, on exceedingly rare occasions, when all other possibilities have been exhausted, it is unfortunate but may be necessary to use potentially lethal force to maintain the four requisites needed to survive in this world.

That is your choice as a lay person. You will have to deal with the consequences of that decision, but it doesn't mean you cannot recover from whatever karmic effect comes from the act.

We must remember the Jataka story of the Buddha as a ship captain in a previous life as a bodhisattva who killed a pirate who planned to kill everyone in order to steal cargo.

We also must call to mind the complexity of karma, and the fact that Angulimala eventually become an arhat.

I'm not going to go into details on the degree of killing either, but obviously the taking of human life is considered worse than the taking of animals. Yet, you shouldn't go out and slay animals either. The Buddha cautions against the slaughter of animals in his words about right livelihood for lay followers to reduce their karmic burden. Proceeding down the hierarchy of forms of violence and killing, we can further examine the karmic consequences of taking the lives of other sentient beings. All these count in the karmic bank account.

We must understand the first precept in the context of karma and not view the precepts as commandments, as has been noted before.

At the same time, we must also come to an understanding that peace cannot come from violence and that there is still a level of unsatisfactoriness that comes with having the practical need to kill in this world. From there, we can turn to a greater peace. The Buddhist path is a gradual path.

Those are my thoughts from what I know in the canon. Please correct me if I'm wrong about these canonical passages.

Full disclosure, I have had the good fortune of walking with Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi at one of his Buddhist Global Relief walks -- an initiative that is an act of great compassion on his part. Yet, I also have learned from with certain forest tradition monastics who dedicated themselves to a certain lifestyle and karmic trajectory with less interest in certain societal affairs. So, I have respect for all members of the noble sangha and can see different perspective on applying the Dhamma in particular circumstances.

Thank you.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 25, 2014, 5:08 pm

.I am glad to have your viewpoint on kamma. I think it was on the whole excellent and I agree with most of it. I'd like to expand on a few points.

"That is your choice as a lay person. You will have to deal with the consequences of that decision, but it doesn't mean you cannot recover from whatever karmic effect comes from the act." I agree with this statement. I have never said that the first precept is a commandment, the violation of which will send you straight to hell, or that there is no chance to make a recovery like Angulimala. Nor have I said there were no gradations to violations of the precepts based on the quality of intention and the circumstances. The bit I have been objecting to, and which it is fair to say Bhikkhu Bodhi has been advocating, is that there would be *positive* kamma (or at least *no* negative karma) coming from intentionally killing under certain circumstances, e.g. saving someone else basically. We need to accept responsibility for our unskillful actions (as you said "That is your choice as a lay person") instead of trying to distort the Dhamma to justify whatever it is we think is right. This is the loophole and slippery slope that I am fighting here.

"We must remember the Jataka story of the Buddha as a ship captain in a previous life as a bodhisattva who killed a pirate who planned to kill everyone in order to steal cargo." I think you might be taking this as counter-evidence that killing is admirable or wholesome in this case. Because the Bodhisattva did something in the Jatakas, does *not* necessarily mean it was wholesome. In some tales he killed, stole, committed adultery and did other unwholesome things, and in others he exhibits great heroism and virtue. The Buddha's teachings should determine how we interpret the Jatakas, not the other way round.

"We must understand the first precept in the context of karma and not view the precepts

as commandments, as has been noted before." I also agree they are not commandments. The Buddha is simply outlining how kamma functions to serve as a guideposts for the suffering and confused. He never compelled people to follow them.

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Reply by [Jayson](#) on August 25, 2014, 7:57 pm

Thanks for your response and expansion of a few of my points.

The Jataka tale is very interesting. I don't see the story as an example of killing as admirable or skillful. More than anything, it points out the dangers of lay life and how it will present you with different challenges than monastic life. In lay life, you may be put in a unique situation where you must determine which is a lesser evil.

That raises the issue of whether it's possible to clearly determine a lesser evil. How do we know a lesser evil won't lead to a greater evil in the future? This starts to travel down the road of utilitarianism.

Also, do we know how many previous lifetimes that we've lived where we've already made that choice of a lesser evil and ended up being reborn again to confront a greater evil?

Again, it all comes down to choice. You can't run from your karma.

However, I don't think you're quite as far apart from Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi as you may think. From what I've read, it doesn't seem like he's suggesting that intentionally killing is completely skillful or without fault. Where there might be disagreement is how much ability a person has in determining the extent of evil. If you believe that you can accurately calculate degrees of negative karma, then you can make a choice of a lesser evil. If not, it's a risky proposition.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 26, 2014, 2:41 am

Hi, thanks for your reply. I think you are correct in describing the complex utilitarian choices that can face us in the world when we try to reduce suffering with a worldly/materialist view, i.e. that what is of primary importance is avoiding physical suffering and preserving physical life. These values make complete sense in their context. And I also do not also wish to give the impression that I completely disregard physical suffering and death as immaterial. Not at all, which is why I have railed in this thread at what I see as the end result of creating justifications for killing. Unwholesome views taken to their logical conclusion have caused the most horrific bloodshed.

Your view is a bit more interesting because it seems to reflect an attempt to reconcile a worldly context with the Buddha's karmic context, or the Dhamma, which prioritizes your "kammic" life over your physical life. In the Dhamma your actions have paramount importance in shaping your reality and creating effects in the world over very long terms, potentially countless lives. Your physical life could end today. This is why, given the context, it is far more important to protect your kamma, than to sacrifice your principles to save your life. So the precepts are not a arbitrary "commandments." They are distillations of utilitarian calculations based on a (very) long-term context. The world can be complex and confusing. How do we know what's right?

On the night of the Buddha's enlightenment, when his mind was refined and concentrated, he could trace back the tangled chains of cause and effect through his previous lives and saw what caused happiness and what caused suffering. And he also could sort out the chains of cause and effect in other beings' lives. If you find this account credible (or at least not incredible) the Buddha had a much more sophisticated understanding of the causes of suffering than we do. And the Buddha's purpose in giving the precepts was to give some basic rules for guidance that he had distilled from his understanding. They serve a bit like safety rails. When the mind is getting overwhelmed in the welter of competing values, greed, anger and confusion can appear and suggest, "Just take it, nobody's looking," or "She's a nice one, I don't care if she's got a husband and family," or ... "The only way to solve the problem is to kill my opponent." So if we have these safety rails we can immediately cut through these crazy ideas the mind is giving us. If we don't, if these suggestions are not absolutely out of the question, we're much more likely to be tricked and carried away by sly rationalizations. So when you have the precepts, you can immediately detect when your mind has gone too far and is suggesting crazy things that will lead to suffering. And you can also immediately detect when someone else has gone too far and is proposing

crazy things, e.g. when "spiritual teachers" try to sleep with their students ... or when they tell you that killing can be justified. The knee-jerk assumption that if you hold the precepts to be "absolute" you are automatically "rigid" or trying to condemn people to hell ... I think is fallout from the Western tradition where people were oppressed by commandments and guilt and blind submission. But there is another way of regarding them where their absolute or uncompromising aspect is a tremendous and precious gift, like lighthouses in a dangerous channel crossing, or a tree branch in a raging flood. You may get tossed around and hardly know which way is up, but you can say, "At least I know this much..." This is why I find it so dismaying when "Buddhist" teachers try to knock these few precious absolutes from the world and try to leave us with no solid ground at all, no fixed reference points.

Briefly, I want to address potential objections to my statement about "prioritizing your kammic life over your physical life," to wit, "that it's selfish, whatnot." This is a kind of false conflict that doesn't exist in the Dhamma. The Dhamma cuts through the confusion of the world in that, if an action is (truly, not superficially) good it's good for everybody. And if an action is bad, it's bad for everybody. As the pre-political Bhikkhu Bodhi put so eloquently, "Of course even then I can never ensure that other living beings will be absolutely immune from harm and suffering, but this is beyond anyone's power. All that lies within my power and the sphere of my responsibility are the attitudes and actions that emanate from myself towards others." The problem with trying to "save the world" is that it is a very steep and slippery slope toward "ends justifies the means" thinking, which is the basis for all degree of atrocities. And I accuse the political Bhikkhu Bodhi of trying to peddle this very thing, this debased formula as the Buddha's Dhamma, namely, that the good end of saving people justifies evil means ... to kill them first. How can it be that a philosophy regarded as low and repugnant even by secular standards, could be the Dhamma? How could an expedient and amoral form of utilitarianism be compatible with kamma and rebirth? I want encourage people, and Bhikkhu Bodhi himself, to think really, really hard about *what exactly it is that he is saying with his U.N. based doctrine of Just war* and not let it pass on his reputation without examination.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 24, 2014, 5:00 pm

re: Bhikkhu Bodhi's "Buddhist" War Doctrine

Compare Bhikkhu Bodhi's view today:

Thus, contrary to yourself and other radical fundamentalists, I tend to take the moral directives of the texts as *general rules, intrinsically valid but not unconditional absolutes*. The real world is just too complex and messy for moral absolutes to bear desirable fruit.

...with his "radical fundamentalist" views from 2010 (against all violence, let alone killing):

[The] Buddha teaches time and again that violence must be avoided, that peace can *never be established by force* and conquest...The Buddha says that peace can *only* be found outside the vicious circle of conquest and violence... Conquer the hostile person by love and goodness... The Buddha taught: For it is only by love, *never* by violence that hatred can be brought to cease; For it is *only* by peace, by patience, by kindness and compassion that the cycle of violence and revenge can be brought to a stop. --Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi 2010 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/46909222/Social-Dimension-of-Buddha-s-teaching>

...or against his eloquent and uncompromising stance from 1994:

Of course even then I can never ensure that other living beings will be absolutely immune from harm and suffering, but this is beyond anyone's power. *All* that lies within my power and the sphere of my responsibility are the attitudes and actions that emanate from myself towards others. And as long as these are circumscribed by the training rule to abstain from taking life, *no living being* need feel threatened in my presence, or fear that harm and suffering will come from me. -- Bhikkhu Bodhi 1994 <http://www.accesstosight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel282.html>

Or compare the Bhikkhu Bodhi's current relativist or situational stance (which approves of killing people should they present a credible threat to national security) vs. his uncompromising take on the fifth precept on liquor. (It's curious that he gives the Buddha credit for understanding "well the subtle, pernicious nature of addiction," but not the overt, pernicious nature of war.)

For his lay followers the Buddha has prescribed five precepts as the minimal moral observance: abstinence from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and the use of intoxicants. He did not lay down these precepts arbitrarily or out of compliance with ancient customs, but *because he understood, with his omniscient knowledge, which lines of conduct lead to our welfare and happiness and which lead to harm and suffering*. The fifth precept, it should be stressed, is not a pledge merely to abstain from intoxication or from excessive consumption of liquor. *It calls for*

*nothing short of total abstinence.* By this rule the Buddha shows that he has understood well the subtle, pernicious nature of addiction. --Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi 1997

[http://www.vipassana.com/resources/bodhi/discipline\\_of\\_sobriety.php](http://www.vipassana.com/resources/bodhi/discipline_of_sobriety.php)

(*italics* all mine.)

I dare say there seem to be some glaring inconsistencies between Bhikkhu Bodhi's teachings of today and formerly, but readers can judge for themselves. It's not in the least difficult to find instances of his "absolutist" and "radical fundamentalist" teachings by googling about. I think it's a fair question to ask, given the gravity and novelty of what he is proposing, whether he believes he can reconcile his former teachings (which were consistent with the Pali Canon and Theravada Buddhism) with his current promotion of a Just War doctrine? Or does he disown his pre-2010 teachings related to the Dhamma in order to make way for it?

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Reply by [buddhasoup](#) on August 24, 2014, 5:43 pm

Why not let Ven. Bodhi explain where he is coming from on these issues of concern for the 21st century?: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7miNzN5n3-s>

This is what distinguishes wisdom from dogmatism or fundamentalism. I trust that men and women of the caliber of Bhikkhu Bodhi can act as wise kalyana mitta for the rest of us, who take the Dhamma seriously and to heart. Wisdom defined: wis-dom 'wizdəm/ noun. "the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment; the quality of being wise. The soundness of an action or decision with regard to the application of experience, knowledge, and good judgment. The body of knowledge and principles that develops within a specified society or period."

I will take wisdom over dogmatic application any day.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 24, 2014, 10:37 pm

I am reposting the four questions that took the stuffing out of your previous arguments. I challenge you to answer them as I have answered yours.

1. You state the first precept as: "I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking life," and explain "that the injunction applies to the skillful kamma that is cultivated by adherence to the training rules." Putting it the other way round it reads: "by not adhering to the training rule you cultivate unskillful kamma." Could you please explain why it is you think this supports your position and not mine?
2. The Buddha's declaration of the Middle Path is as follows: "Monks, these two extremes ought not to be practiced by one who has gone forth from the household life. (What are the two?) There is addiction to indulgence of sense-pleasures, which is low, coarse, the way of ordinary people, unworthy, and unprofitable; and there is addiction to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy, and unprofitable. (transl. Piyadassi Thera)" What is it in this passage that supports your argument? Do you consider refraining from killing other people to be an addiction to punishing yourself?"
3. Is there some rule you know of that the Buddha was transgressing when he bathed the filthy monk? If there were, that would support your argument.
4. I understand that you were a samanera (for a time) and never ordained as a monk, but maybe you have some familiarity with the Monks' Rules anyway as in my case. My understanding is that the first four Monks' Rules are the parajikas, and that they are: no killing, no stealing, no sex and no making false claims of enlightenment. And if a monk violates any one of these rules, he is immediately and automatically ejected from the Sangha with no chance ever again in this life to ordain as a monk. I don't know about you, but that sounds awfully "rigid" to me. And there are absolutely no exceptions for a monk intentionally killing another human being even if you're doing it to protect another, even your mother. How, then, do you square this with your theory that the Buddha was categorically not "rigid," as you seem to assert? Or that the Buddha's injunction against killing by laypeople or armies couldn't also have been "rigid" and absolute? I also invite Bhikkhu Bodhi, who should have an intimate knowledge of the Monks' Rules, to explain this strange "absolutism" in the Buddha Dhamma.
4. How do you square your sense of "situational morality" of the Buddha and the Dhamma (I think this is a fair term, but you may correct me), with Bhikkhu Bodhi's lovely and accurate teaching on the precept against killing that I posted below? Did you read it? I like the part where he says: "All that lies within my power and the sphere of my responsibility are the attitudes and actions that emanate from myself towards others. And as long as these are circumscribed by the training rule to abstain from taking life, no living being need feel threatened in my presence, or

fear that harm and suffering will come from me." Shall we update it to: "... some living beings ought to feel threatened in my presence, and fear that harm and suffering will come from me, depending on the situation."?

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Reply by [buddhasoup](#) on August 24, 2014, 11:04 pm

"I challenge you to answer them as I have answered yours."

OneVoice, I want to see you respond to my earlier challenge first. I challenged you to really put your regard for life and nonviolence into practice, and make a donation to Buddhist Global Relief. As I had mentioned earlier, Ven. Bodhi has done more to improve the lives of malnourished children, to support education for women in disadvantaged countries, and bring global awareness to food insecurity than any Buddhist monastic on the planet. Here's the link: <https://buddhistglobalrelief.org/active/donation.php>.

Be as forceful with your dana as you are with your debate.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 25, 2014, 3:20 am

Bhikkhu Bodhi's Doctrine of Just War

You are attempting to reverse the order of things. I will take your unwillingness to face up to my questions after multiple reminders as an admission of failure. You are also trying to divert the discussion and bring it down to a personal level (again) by making an issue of my charity. I hope readers will review the thread carefully with an eye to integrity. For the record, since you seem unable or unwilling to follow basic rules of civil debate, I will be disregarding your posts.

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Reply by [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#) on August 24, 2014, 7:45 pm

There is some intelligent discussion of Theravada Buddhism and just war theory in Tessa Bartholomeusz, *In Defense of Dharma*, pp. 47-48. The whole book may be worth a reading (though I just discovered it online). Here is an excerpt:

"According to Childress, if an "obligation is viewed as absolute, it cannot be over-ridden under any circumstances; it has priority over all other obligations with which it might come into conflict." Read in this light, the CSS's [Cakkavatti-Sihanada Sutta's] depiction of the just king who maintains his army – even after disavowing violence – suggests that non-violence can be over-ridden, that violence can be justified, if only as a "last resort." The canon's representation of the just king can be translated into the language of just-war scholarship in the following way: as Childress reminds

us in his exposition of Christian just-war tradition, the obligation to be non-violent is "intrinsically binding, but it does not determine one's actual obligation." With this in mind, some of the views on the CSS reviewed here, which focus on its just king and army, seem reasonable: the king's prima facie duty to practice nonviolence is binding, but violence remains possible and even justifiable in some contexts. But (as is the case with prima facie duties in general) owing to the fact that in Theravada Buddhism it is, prima facie, wrong to be violent, any violent act demands good reason....

"In the Buddhist context, as my informants suggested, the image of the warlike but pacifist king of the CSS points to a justification for war that can over-ride the prima facie duty of non-violence. However, as in Christian just-war thinking as interpreted by Childress, in the military metaphor of the CSS, the prima facie obligation to be non-violent is not completely canceled even when it is overruled. Rather, the prima facie duty of non-violence, suggested by the present but inactive army of the warrior king, is possibly intended to guide and limit justifiable violent acts. If it is over-ruled by another prima facie responsibility, such as Childress reminds us, the protection "of the innocent from unjust attack, [or] to restore rights wrongfully denied, or to reestablish a just order," it is not deemed inoperative."

Bartholomeusz interviewed a number of prominent monks at different points along the spectrum, from ultra-nationalist to somewhat detached scholar-monks, and the ones she cites in the passages I have read so far all seem to recognize the limits to the application of non-violence. For example, Ven. Piyadassi of Vajirarama Monastery (1914-1998) who was one of my own kalyanamittas in Sri Lanka, said in his interview:



"Here the king might have to use the army and use force. Well, the Buddha never interfered in these matters [of the state] and surely he would have known that even righteous kings would have to defend themselves if attacked. You have to defend yourself. These are difficult questions. If someone goes to kill my mother, I'm going to stop him. So this could be a condition in which I am forced to kill. But still killing is killing and saving is saving. Killing cannot be justified in Buddhism, but a king defending the country and Buddhism can [be justified]; the Buddha never got involved in these matters."

So Bhikkhu Bodhi is not in the unique position of dragging all the other Theravada monks and nuns throughout Asia into a hell hole contrary to their beliefs. In fact, in his insistence on the absolutely unconditional force of the precept to abstain from taking life--as admitting of no exonerating circumstances--our friend "One Voice" is, among Theravadins in Asian countries, almost--if not quite--literally "one voice."

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 25, 2014, 7:30 pm

Re Bhikkhu Bodhi's Doctrine of Just War

Just to review: I had accused your advocacy of situational state-sponsored killing as being wholly unsupported by the Pali Canon and Theravada Buddhism. In response you have presented a number of arguments after which you eloquently conclude that, inversely, "almost" every Asian Theravadin has a view aligned with yours, i.e. that the Buddha would say killing is *more* wholesome than not killing in certain situations, and that "almost" none are aligned with me. Your view, by the way, you have admitted from the outset has no basis in the Pali Canon. My position, on the other hand, which does have consistent, coherent and pervasive basis in the Pali Canon, is that the intentional killing of a living being is always unwholesome.

Before I address the validity of your arguments, I would like to give you an opportunity to retract or revise your obviously overstated, though poetic and dramatic, conclusion.

Your arguments:

You have referenced this book by Tessa Bartholomeusz, an academic who wrote books about Sri Lankan Buddhism. In an apparent attempt to support the idea that a "Buddhist" doctrine of Just War is seriously discussed by other Theravada scholar-monks and scholars, you dedicate the majority of your post to "the intelligent discussion of Theravada Buddhism and just war theory" of one "Childress" excerpted from Bartholomeusz' book. Childress even interprets "the CSS's [Cakkavatti-Sihanada Sutta's] depiction of the just king who maintains his army." Serious discussion, indeed. I wonder, though, whether you bothered to find out who this "Childress" was. And I wonder whether you think quoting at length a Christian philosopher and theologian who writes books on Just War and Biomedical Ethics makes your case that Just War is seriously discussed among Theravada Buddhists.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Childress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Childress)

You say: "Bartholomeusz interviewed a number of prominent monks at different points along the spectrum, from ultra-nationalist to somewhat detached scholar-monks, and the ones she cites in the passages I have read so far all seem to recognize the limits to the application of non-violence." But the book is not a compendium of interviews with learned and virtuous scholar-monks, but a sociological study of how a country, traumatized and corrupted by decades of ethnic and religious conflict, justifies (or rationalizes) violence in practice. This review with excerpts describes the book in markedly different terms to yours: "In chapter five, 'Sri Lankan Buddhism and Just-war Thinking Revisited,' once more Bartholomeusz calls to the stage examples from the bewildering array of monks, politicians, journalists, scientists, poets, songwriters, laypeople and sangha council members who justify or even glorify (p. 91) violence, evoking variations on the theme of Sri Lanka as a sacred Buddhist island."

<http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2010/04/vroom-review.pdf>. And "One hopes Bartholomeusz's overwhelming amount of evidence pointing to the centrality of violence in Sri Lankan Buddhism will serve as an incentive to do so, and perhaps also create a new awareness among those Sinhalese Buddhists that, as Bartholomeusz contends, have thus far been unable to see the extent and danger of their pro-violence attitudes." Ibid. And "Rather, 'the idea of war, endorsed by monks and legitimated by the vamsas, has become part of the fabric of contemporary Buddhism in Sri Lanka.' As a vivid witness to this, Bartholomeusz describes a sangha of political monks that nowadays

take their refuge vows in 'rata, jatiya, agama or country, nation/race, religion,' instead of the traditional and more all-inclusive Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha." Ibid. Really? Is this what you wish to support your argument with? You have restricted your evidence so far to Sri Lanka, but Buddhist monks in Myanmar are presently leading an ethnic cleansing campaign against the Rohingya Muslim minority. I am certain you don't consider their views to be serious, intelligent discussion of Theravada Buddhism and just war theory. Wouldn't you also agree that doctrines we ascribe to Theravada Buddhism should reflect the most admirable values and voices of the Tradition and not the debased and despicable?

You quote as support for your position Ven. Piyadassi: "Here the king might have to use the army and use force. Well, the Buddha never interfered in these matters [of the state] and surely he would have known that even righteous kings would have to defend themselves if attacked. You have to defend yourself. These are difficult questions. If someone goes to kill my mother, I'm going to stop him. *So this could be a condition in which I am forced to kill.* **But still killing is killing and saving is saving. Killing cannot be justified in Buddhism**, but a king defending the country and Buddhism can [be justified]; the Buddha never got involved in these matters." The only statements that might contradict my position are the two which I have italicized: The first is easily reconciled to my position in that the Venerable is not delusional about the karmic results of being "forced to kill" because he immediately qualifies it with what I've bolded; The second has the only wee bit of support for your position in your post. Namely that one monk in Sri Lanka said "a king defending the country and Buddhism can [?]." You have summarized the crucial bit, "be justified," and provided no reference link. I have been unable to find the quote on my own, but no matter. The whole thing can be easily dismissed. His view as represented claims killing someone to protect "Buddhism" is justifiable and wholesome according to the Dhamma. Do you wish to publicly subscribe for the record to this view as well?

That about does it for your arguments. Your presentation of the unsavory aspects of the Sri Lankan Tradition and my own introduction of the Myanmar monks leading campaigns of ethnic cleansing, however, do present a problem in settling the issue of whether your proposed doctrine of "Just" War represents the Theravada Tradition. If the Tradition includes all self-identifying, "card-carrying" members, lay or ordained, then you are correct. If the Tradition were restricted to those whose Dhamma was defensible in terms of the Buddha's teachings in the Pali Canon, then I would be correct. I would hope that we would both consider the views driving the ethnic cleansing in Myanmar *not* to represent the Theravada Tradition, but beyond that, I don't see a way to increase clarity by pursuing this direction.

I also wish to point out that I have put to Bhikkhu Bodhi a number of proper and tremendously challenging questions elsewhere on this thread. I encourage readers who find this discussion interesting and important to review it to see what has been addressed, what neglected, and the quality of the responses throughout.

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Reply by [Grasshopper](#) on August 27, 2014, 4:56 pm

A note for One Voice:

I have been a Theravada Buddhist all my life, and I must say in your defense that I have never heard any serious Buddhist hold to the opinion the first precept doesn't apply in all circumstances. Every monastic teacher with whom I've studied, both in America and in Asia, has stressed the point that the five precepts are to be followed even during famine and war. I was surprised to learn of the monks who used the Cakkavati Sihanada Sutta to justify killing by the state. I always thought that the main message of that sutta was that the Dhamma king follows policies so wise that he never needs to use his army. It's bad enough to see that message twisted to justify killing. It's even worse to see someone claim that that twisted message is endorsed by the majority of Theravadin Buddhists. So, contrary to Ven. Bodhi's comment, you are not a lone voice in the fight to hold to the first precept in all circumstances. And even if you were the lone voice, it wouldn't be a sign that you were wrong. Issues of right and wrong, blame-worthy and blameless, are not decided by popular vote.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 23, 2014, 6:30 pm

Another addition to this highly informative thread on Bhikkhu Bodhi's "Buddhist" doctrine of Just War...

For the well being and non-confusion of the readers and participants of this thread I thought I would post the teachings of a highly respected Theravada Buddhist scholar-monk who's peaceful and accurate understanding of the Dhamma contradicts Bhikkhu Bodhi's attempt to fabricate a Buddhist doctrine of "just" war, i.e. that the Buddha would have approved of the use of mass lethal force to try to stop a perceived grave and lethal threat from an enemy.

"Political Teachings:

On the problem of war, the Buddha teaches to rule in accordance with Dhamma, the rulers have to avoid aggressiveness and conquer by violence. The Buddha once prevented a war over water (river) between the Koliya and the Sakyan. [The] Buddha teaches time and again that violence must be avoided, that peace can never be established by force and conquest. The conqueror only breeds resentment in those conquered while he himself has to live in constant anxiety worrying that he himself will be defeated in turn. The Buddha says that peace can only be found outside the vicious circle of conquest and violence.

For the Buddha, the real conqueror is not the one who conquers other men, other nations or other society, but one who conquers himself. If there is a warrior who conquers 1000 men 1000 times, his conquest is very slight compared to the conquest of a man who conquers one man, himself. The man who conquers himself, his desires, cravings, anger and delusion, he is the supreme victor in battle. The Buddha teaches that there are four kinds of conquests his followers should make:

1. Conquer the evil person by means of goodness
2. Conquer the liar by truth
3. Conquer the stingy by giving generously
4. Conquer the hostile person by love and goodness.

The Buddha taught:

For it is only by love, never by violence that hatred can be brought to cease;

For it is only by peace, by patience, by kindness and compassion that the cycle of violence and revenge can be brought to a stop." -- Bhikkhu Bodhi

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/46909222/Social-Dimension-of-Buddha-s-teaching>

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Reply by [buddhasoup](#) on August 23, 2014, 7:36 pm

There is no contradiction in what Ven. Bodhi posited in his most recent discussion of appropriate interventions to prevent mass killing of innocents. Everything that he stated in the excerpts of August 23, 2014, 6:30 pm are correct, and equally correct is the very limited exception that he is carving out to avoid the pitfalls of ethical absolutist positions. Ven. Bodhi was also careful to note that his exception is one that he individually posits, and he does not state it to be founded in the EBTs specifically. The Buddha never countenanced such an issue directly, and we have no guidance from the EBTs as to how he would rule on this specific issue.

You've attempted to portray Ven. Bodhi in a contradiction, but it seems to me that all you have done is reveal that you do not understand the careful point that he is making. Blinded by, and clinging to, absolutist views, you are in a sense creating your own sets of conflicts. I didn't respond to your earlier set of questions in large part as I found them to be more flogging of horses. OneVoice, you just don't get the essential point. It's a subtle point, but it's there to be seen.

In my work, I rely on statutes, laws. One law is that a vehicle approaching a stop sign must come to a full and complete stop. This is the law. It is a more than a precept, as it is a requirement imposed under penalty of incarceration or other sanction. However, this law has an exception. An emergency vehicle may, in the course of attending an emergency, drive through the signed intersection without stopping. We recognize that as important as it is that vehicles always stop at stop signs, there are limited exceptions to this rule. This is a simple example of how limited exceptions, grounded in reason and ethics, apply to a given fact pattern. I really feel that is all that Ven. Bodhi was trying to illustrate.

The internet has created some awkward interactions. On this forum, we have a Pali scholar and Dhamma expert who is also a compassionate and dedicated Bhikkhu and modern Bodhisattva, having to suffer darts thrown at him from an internet peanut gallery. Before the internet, OneVoice, you would have had to attend a lecture in a large hall, and test your mettle in an assembly of your peers. You, who are bogged down in the pages of the Pali Suttas so deeply, ignore one of the most important teachings, samma vaca:

"Monks, a statement endowed with five factors is well-spoken.... Which five?

"It is spoken at the right time. It is spoken in truth. It is spoken affectionately. It is

spoken beneficially. It is spoken with a mind of good-will."

— AN 5.198

A mind of affection and a mind of goodwill wouldn't have taken the spitball shots from the peanut gallery as you have done, aimed at a giant among Buddhist scholarship. Perhaps you'll exercise enough bravery to reveal your true name, and I'll be happy to give you mine. Then, we can continue the discussion openly and honestly, and not have the anonymity of the peanut gallery to protect us.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 24, 2014, 12:03 am

re Bhikkhu Bodhi's "Buddhist" radical doctrine of Just War:

"Blinded, clinging, peanut gallery, bogged down, [lacking] bravery, [hidden], [dishonest], no goodwill or affection, horse flogger ;) " Honestly, why does it seem so trying to field my questions straightforwardly without bringing it down to a personal level? If you were really confident in the correctness of your position, couldn't you just brush me away by sending a Dhamma based "dart" straight to the heart of my argument? When I responded to your previous post I cited the highly relevant case of the "absolutist" monks' rule against killing human beings in that it *provides no "limited exceptions."* Period. You present Bhikkhu Bodhi's argument that the precepts were never meant to be "absolutist," and, in your words, that only blind, clinging people would take them that way. Since the Buddha set out the Monks' Rules, do you consider him blind and clinging as well? Or do you assert that the monks rules against killing, stealing, sex and false claims of enlightenment also should have "limited" exceptions?

You seem to be saying that I have no right to challenge Bhikkhu Bodhi's novel doctrine, that I should cower in the formidable shadow of his Pali Scholarship. What you don't factor in is that, however impressive Bhikkhu Bodhi's reputation might be, there are many other "giants" of Theravada Buddhist scholarship, a few in the West, including Bhikkhu Bodhi himself before his teachings became politicized, many of at least of his caliber in Asia, and countless throughout the history of Theravada Buddhism that all *absolutely condemn* his novel position on killing. That is why I refer to it as "rogue," i.e., that it has gone off the rails from Theravada Buddhism. And given he is the one proposing this radical rewrite, he should be prepared to defend it in terms of the Tradition and the Pali Canon. You may agree with him and think it sounds fine. And the both of you have a perfect right to believe whatever it is you want about the rightness of killing people under certain circumstances. But insisting it is also Theravada Buddhism, or represents the Buddha of the Pali Canon, is a bit of having it both ways now isn't it?

As far as revealing my identity, I prefer to let the quality of my arguments carry their own weight, or not. I have no desire to know your true name. I know everything I need from the quality of your arguments and the integrity with which you conduct yourself in debate.

By the way, now that you've had a chance to rest and think about it, the stand-up thing to do would be to either answer the questions I put to your previous arguments or admit you have no basis for them. It's not fair to put something out, and then when someone hands you your hat, accuse them of "flogging."

I have also put some very fair, admittedly difficult, and pertinent questions directly to Bhikkhu Bodhi on this thread, and he has yet to answer most of them. I encourage readers of this thread to evaluate for themselves the relevance and fairness of the questions I have posed against the quality and adequacy of his responses so far.

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Reply by [peacenik](#) on August 22, 2014, 9:40 pm

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, I read your articles with interest and appreciation. Thank you for this (and your other) article(s) [I had forgotten that I had this account and that I could post comments].

I'm very inspired by the coupling of Dharma based insight with social concern.

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Reply by [buddhasoup](#) on August 22, 2014, 11:32 pm

I'd like to add my two baht, if I could. I'm a card carrying Theravadin, and even wore robes for a time as a Samanera in Thailand. One trait that I have noticed among Theravada forums is the itinerant Pali competent Sutta specialist, with an unpleasant and condescending tone. I would

sometimes drift over to friendly and unserious Mahayana forums, simply because the internecine conflicts among lay Theravadins was so toxic. OneVoice, your approach in this discussion reminds me of the bitter tone of some Theravada aficionados that dispense with respect, equanimity, and kindness in order to prove a point.

You have suggested that Ven. Bodhi's position in this discussion is a "pernicious" violation of the Pali Canon's teachings on the precepts. Ven. Bodhi has already carefully described the precepts as the Canon has defined their definition and application. The precepts that I took were couched as "Panasipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami;" "I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking life." The injunction applies to the skillful kamma that is cultivated by adherence to the training rules. These precepts are part of the practice that establishes one on the Path to liberation from samsara. However, these injunctions are not, as has been pointed out, absolutes, as some would see them.

On the issue of a moral use of force in limited exigent circumstances, it seems clear that, while the Canon does not directly discuss exceptions or situations that permit deviation from the training rules, I would argue that the Buddha was not a rigid absolutist, nor did he suffer foolish or self-destructive behavior. He was, in my view, an enlightened pragmatist. When the absolute of asceticism left him near death, a middle ground was found that allowed him to continue his life and path. When he came across a common monk with dysentery, he and Ananda stopped and compassionately bathed the filthy monk; the Buddha saw no impediment to doing what was right at the right time. The Buddha could have gathered the monks, given a talk admonishing them to do better, and assigned others to do the dirty work. But that approach would have elevated form and theory over practicality and morality. In other words, if we look at the Buddha of the EBTs, he is a man not limited by rigid rules, but one exhibiting boundless reason.

OneVoice, you have positioned the First Precept in absolutist terms, but my sense from the Suttas is that the Buddha has never asked us to leave our ethics, wisdom, and reason at the door, but only to undertake the training rules in good faith, apply them to our developing kamma as best we can, and have faith in the fruits of that path. I am grateful that we have wise and compassionate men like Ven. Bodhi to help light the way on that path.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 23, 2014, 12:23 am

I am going to ignore your addressing the tone of my posts, because I have already pointed out the standards of civilized debate elsewhere in the thread. You might wish to consult it. So now let's move on to your argument, about which I have a few questions.

1. You state the first precept as: "I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking life," and explain "that the injunction applies to the skillful kamma that is cultivated by adherence to the training rules." Putting it the other way round it reads: "by not adhering to the training rule you cultivate unskillful kamma." Could you please explain why it is you think this supports your position and not mine?

2. The Buddha's declaration of the Middle Path is as follows: "Monks, these two extremes ought not to be practiced by one who has gone forth from the household life. (What are the two?) There is addiction to indulgence of sense-pleasures, which is low, coarse, the way of ordinary people, unworthy, and unprofitable; and there is addiction to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy, and unprofitable. (transl. Piyadassi Thera)" What is it in this passage that supports your argument? Do you consider refraining from killing other people to be an addiction to punishing yourself?"

3. Is there some rule you know of that the Buddha was transgressing when he bathed the filthy monk? If there were, that would support your argument.

4. I understand that you were a samanera (for a time) and never ordained as a monk, but maybe you have some familiarity with the Monks' Rules anyway as in my case. My understanding is that the first four Monks' Rules are the parajikas, and that they are: no killing, no stealing, no sex and no making false claims of enlightenment. And if a monk violates any one of these rules, he is immediately and automatically ejected from the Sangha with no chance ever again in this life to ordain as a monk. I don't know about you, but that sounds awfully "rigid" to me. And there are absolutely no exceptions for a monk intentionally killing another human being even if you're doing it to protect another, even your mother. How, then, do you square this with your theory that the Buddha was categorically not "rigid," as you seem to assert? Or that the Buddha's injunction against killing by laypeople or armies couldn't also have been "rigid" and absolute? I also invite Bhikkhu Bodhi, who should have an intimate knowledge of the Monks' Rules, to explain this strange "absolutism" in the Buddha Dhamma.

4. How do you square your sense of "situational morality" of the Buddha and the Dhamma (I think this is a fair term, but you may correct me), with Bhikkhu Bodhi's lovely and accurate teaching on the precept against killing that I posted below? Did you read it? I like the part where he says: "All that lies within my power and the sphere of my responsibility are the attitudes and actions that emanate from myself towards others. And as long as these are circumscribed by the training rule to abstain from



taking life, no living being need feel threatened in my presence, or fear that harm and suffering will come from me." Shall we update it to: "... some living beings ought to feel threatened in my presence, and fear that harm and suffering will come from me, depending on the situation."?

5. I also welcome Bhikkhu Bodhi to reconcile this inspiring Dhamma of his with his novel theory of Buddhist "just war."

Thank you for adding your two baht. I welcome your response.

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Reply by [buddhasoup](#) on August 23, 2014, 12:32 am

OneVoice, as it is getting late, and you've (we've) exhausted many minutes of effort and energy flogging this issue, I will make a suggestion: here's the Buddhist Global Relief donation site: <https://buddhistglobalrelief.org/active/donation.php>. Instead of continuing to flog this precept horse, why not do something truly Dhammic and constructive? Support Buddhist Global Relief.

Ven. Bodhi is the monk that has literally taken Theravada off the cushion and engaged it actively with the needs of a suffering world. All the of sharp words and all of the keen debate won't do a thing to feed a hungry or malnourished child. So, instead of doing what we Theravadins seem so capable of doing, which is flogging dhammic horses, why not do something that truly makes merit? Want to support the First Precept with vigor? Save a life...I am sure that Ven. Bodhi's BGR has saved many.

I support BGR..I challenge you to do the same. That's real absolutist Dhamma.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 23, 2014, 12:56 am

I invite you to have a good rest and attempt to face straight on the perfectly valid questions I have put to your argument. Otherwise your response above comes off a bit dodgy. After that I will happily address these new suggestions you have made.

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Reply by [workbc9](#) on August 22, 2014, 3:22 pm

Climate change ( once known as Global Warming) is a hoax. Further, any action by government to "fix " the problem which comes in the form of tax or policies, as proposed by the author, which equates to the use of force seems counter to Buddha nature.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 7:03 pm

Here is an eloquent explanation of the first precept which respects the Buddha's teachings in the Pali Canon and gives no quarter to justifications for intentionally killing any living being, let alone human beings.

One more word should be added concerning the formulation of the precepts. Despite their negative wording, even in that form the precepts are productive of tremendous positive benefits for others as well as for oneself. The Buddha says that one who abstains from the destruction of life gives immeasurable safety and security to countless living beings. How the simple observance of a single precept leads to such a result is not immediately obvious but calls for some thought. Now by myself I can never give immeasurable safety and security to other beings by any program of positive action. Even if I were to go on protest against all the slaughterhouses in the world, or to march against war continuously without stopping, by such action I could never stop the slaughter of animals or ensure that war would come to an end. But when I adopt for myself the precept to abstain from the destruction of life, then by reason of the precept I do not intentionally destroy the life of any living being. Thus any other being can feel safe and secure in my presence; all beings are ensured that they will never meet harm from me. Of course even then I can never ensure that other living beings will be absolutely immune from harm and suffering, but this is beyond anyone's power. All that lies within my power and the sphere of my responsibility are the attitudes and actions that emanate from myself towards others. And as long as these are circumscribed by the training rule to abstain from taking life, no living being need feel threatened in my presence, or fear that harm and suffering will come from me. -- Bhikkhu Bodhi

I miss him.

The full explanation of all the precepts can be found here:

<http://www.accesstosight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel282.html>

For just the first precept, here:

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel282.html#prec2>

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Reply by [mmhalliday](#) on August 21, 2014, 9:07 am

Just wanted to thank Bhikkhu Bodhi for this article. It's a brave man to write so eloquently and clearly on this topic in a US based magazine, given the sad state of affairs in USA when it comes to climate change denial and disinformation. Not that climate change denial is limited to the US, but the US does still carry a lot of political weight in the world and could be leading the way out of this crisis rather than burying its head in the sand.

Certainly effort needs to be made in combatting the deliberate misinformation re climate change that is spread by people and companies with vested interests in maintaining non-sustainable energy sources, destroying the environment, creating obstacles to green development. Daniel Kahnemann has written some very good things about how, as a species, we are not good at making decisions about problems which aren't yet fully visible in the present and which need a long-term perspective to solve them.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 12:57 am

For Bhikkhu Bodhi: You have stated elsewhere in this thread that, "the suttas lay down moral prescriptions ... [that] ... would clash with what appears to be another moral obligation, namely, to avoid the brutal slaughter of many people after all attempts to do so by peaceful means have failed." Just to get to the nut we should replace the word "avoid" with "stop with deadly force." I do think that fairly represents your position. My question is, then, where in the Canon (not the UN Charter) can you find support for this "moral obligation"? The point being, you may find it persuasive, but do you have any business calling it Buddha Dhamma?

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 20, 2014, 10:09 pm

I would like to ask Bhikkhu Bodhi in particular whether he would justify torture, and assert that the Buddha's Dhamma justifies torture, in a case where a government sincerely believed that it was the only way to get information that would prevent a mass terrorist attack against a domestic population?

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Reply by [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#) on August 20, 2014, 11:31 pm

Firstly, torture is prohibited by the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment. Moreover Article 2.2 of the Convention states: "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."

See <http://www.un.org/documents/qa/res/39/a39r046.htm>

Thus, simply on legal grounds (which are in turn based on moral grounds) I could not approve of torture, nor would I ever argue that the Buddha Dhamma can justify torture.

Secondly, it is a well established fact, based on statements from experienced interrogators, that torture is not only ineffective as a means of acquiring reliable information, but it is actually counterproductive. One example going back to 2009: "Over the weekend, Ali Soufan, the FBI interrogator who is credited with helping acquire most of the useful intelligence from Abu Zubayda prior to his being waterboarded, responded to torture apologists who argue that torture was necessary to save American lives. Soufan points out that torture as policy locked out those interrogators who had the most expertise about Al Qaeda as an organization (the CIA didn't have an interrogation program until after 9/11), and as a result of torture, we may have failed to get as much useful information as we could have."

From "Torture's Failure," American Prospect

<http://prospect.org/article/tortures-failure>

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 12:37 am

You seem to cite UN Charters and Conventions with the same finality that I do with the Buddha Dhamma! Given that this thread is on Tricycle: the Buddhist Review, I don't think I'm out of place in saying I couldn't care less what some committee of

lawyers at the UN drafted and then submitted to an assembly of politicians for haggling and revision. But we all must choose where to place our faith. I am interested in why you "would ... [n]ever argue that the Buddha Dhamma can justify torture," but you do argue that the Buddha Dhamma can justify intentional killing. Certainly not all, but many, would prefer to be tortured than to be killed. (Unfortunately, it seems wise at this point to point out for the record that I am not advocating torture.) As a follow up, I consider your posting about the ineffectiveness of torture to be an argument based on "the ends justify the means," i.e. that if it were effective you might try to justify it as wholesome, as some of the other posters seem to entertain as a possibility. Is this what you mean to say, and if so, in what way is that Dhamma? I appreciate your willingness to continue to field questions on this thread. Given your influence, I think it is very important to try to tease out all the implications of your radical (from the point of view of Theravada Buddhism) doctrine. Please pardon my blatant disrespect, relative to the Dhamma, of UN Conventions.

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 20, 2014, 11:10 pm

Torture doesn't work that way. An "informant" will say just about anything to appease the torturer. In fact, most experts on torture (including those who have been tortured) agree that it backfires, sometimes causing the "informant" to give information that the torturer wants to hear, but is false and misleading.

Anyone who supports torture does so out of ignorance.

It would be a \*possible\* moral dilemma only if it were uncontroversially effective in its purported goals. As it is, torture is clearly wrong in all cases.

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Reply by [wsking](#) on August 20, 2014, 11:00 pm

Perhaps that is a question better answered by someone skilled in issues of national security than by an ordained monk, OneView. Many Buddhist monks and nuns have been tortured to death in the last century, so it would be hard for us to answer you without personal bias.

Do you have any good ideas for creating a life affirming culture? Where would you start? I don't think torture is quite what we had in mind.

Gassho

\_/\\\_

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 24, 2014, 11:10 am

re: Bhikkhu Bodhi advocates Buddhist doctrine of Just War

I wholeheartedly agree. I wonder if you have noticed that his advocacy for the establishment of a Theravada Buddhist "license to kill," i.e. doctrine of Just War, is predicated on issues of national security, U.N. Conventions, etc.

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Reply by [wsking](#) on August 21, 2014, 2:56 am

I would like to add a thought: While we may know original doctrine and practice it as a personal choice, there is no force that precludes moderation in any practice.

As the fastest growing religious group in America, we have great political responsibility to uphold and improve upon the safety and integrity of American values and American family values.

Should we opt to follow a fundamentalist perspective on issues of defense, such as has been promoted by some in this discussion, Buddhism and Buddhists could eventually be seen as a threat to national security. What would happen to the army, navy, and air force if everyone refused to kill? Who would defend our country, which has been so dearly protected up to now? Who will defend other nations and other peoples in trouble, which we have repeatedly done up to now and I feel should continue to do. It is important to realize that the karma of the world in the future has been made by the decisions of our ancestors in the past, and will be made by us, also.

Therefore, it is essential that we remain practical and open-minded, remembering that all doctrines are intended to help us live with virtue, integrity and happiness, not to bind us into mindless servitude, unable to adapt to changing situations and times.

I believe that the community of nations makes it clear that they hold mutual respect and help as

their primary focus. That they agree they do not want to kill, and that they do want to avoid war. But that when all other avenues of settling differences have failed, it is the right of nations to protect their sovereignty and the right of individuals to protect their lives. This clearly shows the basic goodness of people everywhere. The fact that they could all agree on this is wonderful.

This is a practical view we can uphold as Buddhists in a political world. And we, at least, can be sincere about it. It is important that in both our personal and professional lives, we work for harmony between people, engaging with and supporting those whose difficult responsibilities can benefit from our input and mediation.

If we hold inflexible fundamentalist views on social and political issues, particularly on matters of security and defense, we will be immediately discounted. No one will listen to anything constructive we may say, nor will we be able to help or mitigate difficult situations, or obtain any standing or position in which we could do so.

Therefore, while personally we may keep a fundamentalist practice, publically it is more beneficial for us to protect and help, by keeping a more moderate purpose and view.

Here, I am making a distinction between private practice and social engagement, showing how both may be practised for the benefit of a society.

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Reply by [error](#) on August 20, 2014, 9:41 pm

Beyond my novice questions i also wanted to thank to Bhikku Bodi for his honest, passionate and well reasoned arguments for the necessity of a new life affirming and life sustaining paradigm change in modern global culture. The thread it engendered reminded me of the discussions in philosophy on this and similar topics. How wonderful to know that this and similar conversations about the need for change in modern society are going on in different social milieus, different cultures and from different perspectives. Maybe there is hope for mankind after all.

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Reply by [error](#) on August 20, 2014, 8:57 pm

Even if killing does harm one's karma should an individuals first concern their own personal karma or should the concern first be to help life flourish, something that can and sometimes does seem to necessitate the killing of life. and if that is so, if there is a necessity to kill but harm to one's karma for doing it, is there any difference, karma wise, between killing humans and other animals? My apologies i am new to Buddhism and these questions came up reading the article and consequent thread and i'm a little confused - obviously thank you

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 6:56 pm

There is no "tension" between doing something good for yourself and good for others. If an action is truly good, it is good for you and good for others; If an action is truly bad, it is bad for you and bad for others. For example, apropos of this thread, if you intentionally kill another living being, that's bad for them obviously, but it's also bad for you because deep in your heart you are agonized and conflicted about it, especially if you've killed a human being. The idea that good works require self-sacrifice is a strange and counter-productive idea we have in the West probably inherited from some form of Christianity.

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Reply by [error](#) on August 21, 2014, 10:42 pm

i really don't understand - if your are killing something certainly you are sad to have to do this but as a gardener i have to kill plants, insects and animals all the time and i don't like doing it. is it good for the many things i kill? No, but it is for the other plants i'm cultivating, and it's good for me and for other people and even for other insects and creatures. But also some people are not agonized and conflicted about killing anything - we see this with true psychopaths - and to be honest, for myself i don't think i would feel more conflicted about killing a person than i am about having to kill an animal when necessary. For instance a crazed or violent bear for no appreciable reason is often a sick bear and one would probably be doing it a great favour to kill it, what then, what about when we kill out of compassion? there are so many questions - i apologize for jumping all over the place but i feel more confused than ever about this issue

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 22, 2014, 10:39 am

I'll just address them without explanation for the sake of brevity:

1. Not killing applies to sentient beings, not plants.
2. Insects and animals are sentient beings who suffer and treasure/fight for their lives, so you do everything possible to avoid killing them.
3. You might try the Buddha's precepts for a while and see if in fact they lead to more clarity and less conflict and remorse.
4. You should be able to avoid or stop a crazed attacker without killing him/her/it, and if you should fail you still have the amazing good karma of sticking to your principles even in the most trying of situations to take with you.
5. "Killing out of compassion" is usually a trick or delusion covering up an ulterior motive. When this loophole is created, it opens a Pandora's box of violence and war, which can all be easily justified on the basis of a perceived greater overriding "compassion."

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Reply by [eror](#) on August 23, 2014, 7:37 pm

you avoid killing but are allowed to kill animals if they are an obstacle to your or others survival? - if we are capable of understanding this then - why, if we are indeed being honest with ourselves would anything change if the animal turns out to be a human being? It seems to me that violence and war have a lot to do with greed and fear, not compassion. You are right that everything possible should be tried first to avoid killing but that just isn't always possible - So to end the question, in theoretical and in practical terms - honest action, with no ulterior motives, even if it leads to killing will not then lead to bad karma. Am i understanding you correctly. Sorry to be such a bother but no one else answered my question - i ask these questions because the more literature i read the more confused i get, like with this question and you can't follow a precept if you don't understand how it should go. so again thanks for trying to alleviate the confusion.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 23, 2014, 11:47 pm

I think you have made an honest mistake in reading my previous post. I never said it was allowable to "kill animals if they are an obstacle to your or others survival." So please don't take that misreading and extrapolate it into a justification for killing human beings. (I don't want the heavy karma of creating "Buddhist" justifications for intentional killing! ;) ) To try to answer your question: If you kill a being accidentally without the intention to take their life, it is not a violation of the precept. There could still be some bad karma involved from negligence or an intention to harm, but it is not as severe, say driving pissed on the motorway and killing someone. On, the other hand, if I am driving and bugs are getting squished on the windscreen, It's basically unavoidable and I really have no ill-will or intention to kill them. You are very astute to raise the issue of "ulterior motives." This is what holding to precepts shows you. It's not a bother at all to try to answer your questions. I appreciate your sincere inquiry.

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Reply by [eror](#) on August 27, 2014, 7:51 pm

Sorry for the delay in answering your reply - and thank you for clarifying what i had mistaken. but in a way now i'm stuck back on my original question and honestly feel the need continue but please do not feel bound to answer if you are busy - i have lots of time and maybe you don't - so i won't feel hurt or anything like that and i get the thing about my own life - that is kind of how i've always felt anyway. several times in my life a physical fight broke out and every time i crossed my arms and refused to fight (no, i couldn't run and yes, i got beat up every time). don't know why except the question, "does it really matter who wins and who dies?" always crosses my mind at such times - go figure and if a grizzly catches me, well, i figure we're pretty equal on that question too though i wouldn't guarantee that i wouldn't shoot - particularly since the body is such an imprecise instrument for most of us and fear so easily overcomes reason (i am ashamed to say that i have killed spiders and other insects out of fear). But the deal is way different for me when it's others - when i weigh a hand full of deaths against the immense harm created by that hand full in certain situations - i'm not so sure - and if evil is a karmic occurrence, whats to say



that my attempt to Kill someone isn't equally ordained by karma (in fact must it not be?). (and i'm not trying to be a jerk, i'm really asking) To make a dramatic point and illustrate my original question - Would the demise of people like Hitler and Pol Pot not be worth the karma one would pay to kill them? And if no one can be saved from their suffering, from their karma (that's your contention? not sure) regardless of what i or anyone does then what's the point of doing anything at all ever about anything? Just seems to me that if you can take a threat away from a people, even if that means killing as the last resort then it might be worth the cost on one's karma. This is at the heart of what i am trying to ask - regardless of the difficulties of staying free of 'ulterior motives' - and i agree this is a serious difficulty, maybe impossible to overcome - Anyway thank you so very much for your replies and your patience.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 27, 2014, 10:00 pm

Hi, there is something (fairly lengthy) I posted above (Reply by OneVoice on August 26, 2014, 6:41 am) that seems to answer some of your questions, especially the ethical conflicts that arise from holding a materialist or a hybrid materialist/kammic world view. With regard to the questions above re grizzlies, Pol Pot, and Hitler, remember that the first precept draws the line at intentionally trying to take the life of another being. It doesn't say you can't fight or try to stop or disable your opponent. After reading the above post, if you have other questions I'll be happy to try to answer.

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Reply by [eror](#) on August 29, 2014, 12:10 am

Thank you for redirecting me back to the thread. It was indeed helpful. In fact your exchange with Jason between Aug 24, 10:42 pm and Aug.27, 1:05 pm is exactly what i was trying to get at. I can only be grateful to Jason for being far more eloquent in asking the questions than i could ever hope to be. The issue of weighing options and harms in order to attain the best answer in a situation where no answer could be called 'good' was exactly what i was trying to get at. The comment in your last message, that we are allowed to fight or try to disable someone when absolutely necessary gave me the last clue to what you are trying to get at ( i think ): Under no circumstances should we go into a situation intending to kill because this is a slippery slope and us humans have never been known to maintain our footing under such conditions, mainly because temptation and greed and all the stuff of Mara can so easily blind us and lead us on farther down that slope, creating maybe even more suffering than the intentional killing was meant to stop. And by the creating of this suffering through the original intentional killing (almost like a domino effect, as one of the sutras seemed to describe it) one's karma is immeasurably harmed. On the other hand, if the intention is to preserve life at all cost and if we are truly not in thrall to some ulterior motive, then if death comes to the one we are trying to stop through our actions then this unintentional killing will not create this domino effect of harm, or at least will not create harm to the same degree to either one's karma or to other living beings. Could i ask if this understanding of your position is correct? Can only hope my understanding has some merit after all your attempts to explain.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 31, 2014, 6:17 pm

I think you put it very well, especially about how the bright line rule provides a check to keep Mara from blinding us.

You also say: "And by the creating of this suffering through the original intentional killing (almost like a domino effect, as one of the sutras seemed to describe it) one's karma is immeasurably harmed." This

sentence seems to say that we will be responsible for the snowballing kamma of our bad action. I might be reading you wrong, but I'll say this just in case.

My bad intention and action reaps its own bad result. Part and parcel of the bad intention and action was the bad example that could snowball from the influence it might have on others. This could be particularly bad if I broadcast my bad action or evil view far and wide. However, I am not fully responsible for all the bad actions that may or may not snowball from mine, because other beings have a degree of free will and are, in turn, responsible for their own bad actions. On the other hand results we do not directly control are part of the mix of the kammic results we reap. If I intend to kill a man, and he lives, this is much better for me than should he die.

I hope these examples help to clarify rather than to obscure.

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Reply by [eror](#) on September 1, 2014, 7:56 pm

Your explanation was greatly appreciated and definitely helped to clarify my understanding of how karma works -not that i'm ready to go off and teach, or anything! - But truly, thank you for all your efforts and all your posts.

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Reply by [bhb21](#) on August 20, 2014, 8:17 pm

I cannot believe this got printed! are all Buddhists as uninformed as you are and yet so willing to espouse unadulterated crap? you do not understand capitalism nor economic principles, you ignore other scientific views on global warming and we are not at a crossroads. it is people like you that use sensationalism instead of truth and logic to try to stampede people to your view. the best that can be said is you are a pontificating "holier than thou" know it all socialist that wants to dictate the lives of others. did you not learn anything from your years of practice and meditation? the comments show that most Buddhists appear to be sheep just trying to be more righteous than the rest? or maybe the smart ones just ignored this article for its lack of anything substantive. my bad

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Reply by [wsking](#) on August 21, 2014, 12:03 pm

It is your bad, well said.  
Would you care to share with us your good?  
Gassho  
\_/\\_

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 1:08 am

This is an interesting example of how monks engaging in politics can alienate from and destroy faith in the Dhamma of segments of the population with different political orientations, regardless of whether you agree with him or her. Surely, this is one of the reasons the Buddha explicitly said political activity was wrong livelihood for monks.

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Reply by [Lavender](#) on August 19, 2014, 11:43 pm

There are a couple of points I'd like to contribute. The first is that I often hear people saying that we need to find or develop or spread a new paradigm; this might be true for settlers in colonial countries, but not for indigenous peoples who already have had and still recognize cosmologies of interrelation, interdependence, and respect for all life. It may seem like an obvious point to make, and I'm sure that the author is not saying otherwise, but what we should really be doing in my opinion is connecting to our roots - all of us - those that extend back to a time when the commons were seen as a means of subsistence and labour was not appropriated for private accumulation and control. There was a time when all peoples understood that stewardship of all life was the only practical and ethical way to live. So I'm suggesting that we reach into the past as well as look to the future. Secondly, I think we need to go even further than naming capitalism as the culprit here.

More important than the type of system we adopt is who is designing it and implementing it, and how. Capitalism is not actually an economic system first and foremost. It's the *modus operandi* of the colonial machine, which seeks to enclose, alienate, privatize, and exploit resources for the benefit of the privileged and powerful. That's why changing the economic system isn't a panacea. It won't end patriarchy or racism. What will be the process of decolonization. It's time for those of privilege to step aside and make space for those who have been marginalized for so long. First, we heal the wounds and renew respect among peoples, and together we find a way forward, by listening and sharing. My fear is that the dominant society, though well-meaning, will build another revolution on top of injustices and inequities and pretend that the slate is wiped clean, just as it has before. Let's do it right this time.

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Reply by [philboyd](#) on August 23, 2014, 8:33 am

I find it interesting that people who have taken personal responsibility for their own spiritual wellness look for a government to solve social ills. A non virtuous and ill informed culture will inevitably succumb to tyrannic rule. We do not live in an enlightened age, our near future is bleak. We have surrendered our sovereign power to those who fan the flames of social unrest and fuel that fire through ignorance.

'''

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Reply by [tshaw](#) on August 23, 2014, 10:22 pm

Agreed.

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Reply by [philboyd](#) on August 23, 2014, 12:02 am

I have read Adam Smith, and from that perspective kindly ask: where do you believe capitalism to exist today?

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Reply by [Dominic Gomez](#) on August 18, 2014, 12:06 pm

The roots of this paradigm are the 3 poisons of greed, belligerence and ignorance innate in human life. Buddhist practice empowers each individual to expand beyond such a restrictive life-condition.

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Reply by [Tharpa Pema](#) on August 18, 2014, 9:33 am

I continue to appreciate the inclusion of Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi 's perspective in Tricycle's coverage of the Buddhist movement. I find it underrepresented in most media markets. The language of blame is stronger than I myself would choose. My experience has been that such specifically targeted blame can obstruct desired change instead of furthering it. Nevertheless, I like his vision of a better way of being human together very much. Thank you!

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Reply by [tshaw](#) on August 23, 2014, 10:23 pm

Agreed.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 17, 2014, 7:50 pm

Again it is important for Buddhists, at least Theravada Buddhists, to be very clear that there are no valid justifications for intentionally killing under any circumstances. It is no use to argue points from Mahayana, Vajrayana or Christian teachers, as these traditions already have well-developed justifications (rationalizations) for "just" war. What is appalling about Bhikkhu Bodhi's argument is that, as a senior teacher in the Theravada tradition, he is trying to inject these pernicious views into the Pali Canon, where there is absolutely no support for it.

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Reply by [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#) on August 18, 2014, 4:00 am

One Voice,

You write: "What is appalling about Bhikkhu Bodhi's argument is that, as a senior teacher in the Theravada (sic) tradition, he is trying to inject these pernicious views into the Pali Canon, where there is absolutely no support for it."

Now compare your assertion with what I actually say in the essay:

"The suttas, it must be clearly stated, do not admit any moral justification for war. Thus, if we take the texts as issuing moral absolutes, one would have to conclude that war can never be morally justified."

"The early Buddhist texts are not unaware of the potential clash between the need to prevent the triumph of evil and the duty to observe nonviolence. The solution they propose, however, always endorses nonviolence even in the face of evil.... The Jataka stories, too, endorse strict adherence to the law of nonviolence, even for a ruler threatened by a foe."

"When the motive [for going to war] is genuine national defense or preventing a rogue nation from disrupting global peace, moral valuation would have to reflect these very different circumstances. Nevertheless, if one relies solely on canonical statements, the volition of harming others would always be considered "wrong intention" and all acts of destroying life classed as unwholesome."

"Wouldn't we maintain that in this situation [when the Nazis are pursuing their quest for global domination] military action to stop the aggressor is laudable, even obligatory, and that a soldier's actions can be viewed as morally commendable? Hesitantly, I would have to adopt this latter position, even though I cannot justify it by appeal to Buddhist texts, whether canonical or commentarial."

Thus I did not try "to inject" any views of my own into the Pali Canon, but to explore a problem that arises from reflection on the canon. The problem is that the suttas lay down moral prescriptions as general rules and do not address situations where following a moral rule—in this case, not to kill—would clash with what appears to be another moral obligation, namely, to avoid the brutal slaughter of many people after all attempts to do so by peaceful means have failed. In addressing this problem I concluded:

"Nevertheless, the complexity of the human condition inevitably confronts us with circumstances where moral obligations run at cross-currents. In such cases, \*I believe\*, we must simply do our best to navigate between them, using as our criterion the reduction of harm and suffering for the greatest number of those at risk."

I thus made it quite clear that this was my own opinion, not a position adopted in the Pali Canon. You may disagree with me about this and hold that the precepts are universal absolutes that admit of no exceptions under any circumstances. But please do not misrepresent me in a public forum, since that is not beneficial for either of us. Thank you.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 19, 2014, 2:26 pm

I have, in fact, stated in previous posts that you openly admitted in your article that there is no support for your position in the Pali Canon. Your indignity is misplaced however, because you do indeed inject your pernicious view of "just war" into the Pali Canon by indirect means: by inventing a lacunae in the Buddha's teachings where one does not exist, and presuming to fill it with your view.

You seem to think that genocide and mass slaughter are something new under the sun, something that never happened before or during the Buddha's time, something the Buddha could never foresee. Maybe the scale of WWII was larger, but there's nothing that points to some cosmic qualitative change in the kind of evil humans are capable of. I'm sure you know better than I all the horrendous stories of mass slaughter, torture and warfare in the Canon. But using WWII as a basis, you seem to conclude that had the Buddha thought about the issue of mass slaughter or genocide, he himself would have inserted some wiggle room into the precepts.

I applaud your admission that this is your "own opinion, not a position adopted by the Pali Canon." I think it would be suitable as well if you would state that just as there no support for a doctrine of "just war" in the Canon, there is also no support for the idea that the Buddha meant for the precepts not to be absolute. Or put the other way round: there's nothing anywhere in the Canon that indicates the Buddha meant for the precepts to be conditional, broken when you think there is an overriding need.

Finally, I would like to be so bold as to suggest that since you "made it quite clear that this was my own opinion, not a position adopted in the Pali Canon," that you revise at the very least the title of your article from: "War & Peace: a Buddhist

Perspective," to the less misleading "War & Peace: My Perspective." And, given your close association to Theravada Buddhism through ordination and your Pali scholarship, for clarity's sake it would be helpful to place a bold disclaimer that you are making a clean break with your status as a spokesperson for Theravada Buddhism when you put forth a view so antithetical to the Pali Canon and to the Tradition.

With all due respect.

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Reply by [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#) on August 20, 2014, 2:47 pm

Although I recognize your sincerity and your concern to uphold the ethical principles of the Dhamma, I want to bring some additional points up for your consideration. First, I should point out that your understanding of Buddhist ethics is fundamentally wrong. The Buddhist precepts are not inviolable commandments issued by the Buddha on some kind of divine authority, nor are they set forth as prescriptions for social policy to be implemented on the macro-scale. They are set forth as training principles that a person freely adopts in order to cultivate a wholesome way of life. They function as guides to conduct that are in line with the workings of karma, conducive to a favorable rebirth and the attainment of final liberation. However, due to personal circumstances, not everyone who follows the Buddha Dhamma, even with sincere faith, can observe every precept with impeccable purity, and the consequences of adopting them on a collective scale can be deleterious, as a little reflection would bring to light.

It is one of the bitter truths of mundane life that the maintenance of social order, the curbing of destructive violence, and the establishment of a reasonable degree of safety and security for the citizens of a country requires that some persons take on the responsibility for using forceful, even lethal, methods of curbing miscreants who have no respect for the lives of others. And except perhaps in some aboriginal societies, every modern society is prone to bringing forth malicious or psychopathic miscreants, and in international relations, countries desiring to live in peace are subject to aggression by other countries intent on gaining territory, natural resources, or avenging past grievances. Those in positions of social responsibility—whether police or military—have to use effective ways of curbing this destructive behavior, and inflexible adherence to the first precept, except in the "miracle stories" of the Jatakas, is not going to work in practice. Even Aung San Su Kyi admitted that if she became president of Burma, she would likely have to give orders for lethal means to be used to maintain social stability. She spoke of this as an "occupational hazard."

The irony is that if your prescriptions (as well as those of Geshe Dargyey, with all due respect to him) were adopted as public policy, given our current social structures and values, society would likely degenerate in a short time into mayhem and a chaos of mutual murder. As a Buddhist, I always sustain the hope that some day our society can be transformed from our present "culture of death" into a true "culture of life," but this will require fundamental changes in many dimensions of our communal life, more than can reasonably be expected in the near future.

I never thought others would consider my essay on War and Peace controversial, let alone verging on heresy, as you do. I believed I was simply stating common sense, especially because I used as my paradigm the Allied campaign against the Nazis in World War II. Though you seem to say that the Allies were no better morally than the Nazis in their conduct of the war, I think there is too much evidence to the contrary (though for sure I don't approve of all aspects of the Allied campaigns, especially the bombing of German cities and the use of the atom bombs in Japan). I also don't agree with Geshe Dargyey, who is transposing the observance of precepts in the style of an ordained monastic or dedicated lay follower to the conduct of national and global affairs. He is not alone in this. I have known of several Theravadin monks, even highly intelligent ones, commit the same mistake.

I really wonder whether the Buddha, if he were alive in 1939-41, would have recommended capitulating to the Nazis rather than opposing them militarily. It is intriguing (as I pointed out in the essay) that we never find in the texts any cases where a conflict of obligations—or a situation with conflicting moral aspects—is brought to the Buddha's attention for advice. Perhaps it was because he realized that worldly affairs are just too complex for any simple formulas to work that he did not address situations of moral conflict, not because he regarded the precepts as unconditional absolutes. Thus, contrary



to yourself and other radical fundamentalists, I tend to take the moral directives of the texts as general rules, intrinsically valid but not unconditional absolutes. The real world is just too complex and messy for moral absolutes to bear desirable fruit.

I wonder, by the way, whether you are aware of the \*tone\* of your comments (as contrasted with the contents). Though you advocate strongly for non-violence, several of us have noted a distinct vehemence—even virulence—in the tone of your remarks. Since one's verbal expression is a manifestation of one's state of mind, I hope you will keep careful watch over your mental states and make an earnest effort to transform anger and belligerence into calm, gentleness, and kindness. We would all delight in being able to carry on a more cordial and polite conversation on such important issues.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 20, 2014, 8:22 pm

There was a distinct shift in the argument in that bit at the end from your justification of state-sponsored killing to my character and mental state. Quickly in my defense before I address your reasoning: Despite having been on the receiving end on this thread of epithets such as "radical fundamentalist, fundamentalist (I hope you understand the concept of "loaded language"), pharisee, Subhuti, Sariputta (undeserved), devil's advocate, insulting, disrespectful, belligerent, virulent, Heffalump (!) etc," I have refrained from directly addressing the character or mental state of any of my accusers. If you care to review the thread you will see this is the case. I have, on the other hand, used the strongest, most direct, accurate and unswayed terms to denounce views and arguments that corrupt the Dhamma with regard to an issue that could have catastrophic ramifications for human suffering into the future. I find that sometimes truly abhorrent positions can be tarted up with posh words and sophisticated philosophical arguments, so I aim for direct and succinct. If a point can't be made in plain language, it's probably bunk. I am aware that I do not conform to the typical mode of communication of Western Buddhists, and they may be put off by having their beliefs and arguments contradicted and questioned so directly. I admit that my mental state is vehement ... vehement in the sense of wanting to zealously protect the Dhamma, but the virulence ... the virulence belongs to your attempt to justify a doctrine of state sponsored killing and call it "Buddhist." (Please take note that my harsh condemnation is of your actual view/action, not you or your mental state, nor have I attached a dismissive label like "reformist" or whatnot.) So while I have no intention of being cordial or having a tea party, my participation has been, in fact, more polite than some others on this thread in that I have endeavored to respect the rules of civil debate, i.e. to stick to the issues instead of bringing it down to a personal level. I hope all of us will keep careful watch over our responses and make an earnest effort to transform our arguments from personal attacks and diversionary tactics into arguments that respect the rules of civil debate. I promise you should never have to worry that I will directly call into question your character, tone, or mental state, but will always save my vehement condemnation for this vile rationalization for mass murder that you are attempting stamp with the seal of approval of the Dhamma. I hope you will correct me should I slip up and drop to that level. Should I be alerted to it, I promise to admit to it, apologize, and do my best not to repeat it. Maybe we all could take a similar vow.

What a waste of time. Shall we carry on?

1. You ascribe to me the views that the "Buddhist precepts are ... inviolable commandments issued by the Buddha on some kind of divine authority," and that "they [are] set forth as prescriptions for social policy to be implemented on the macro-scale." These are not my views in the least. Nor do I advocate "adopting them on a collective scale." I'm not aware of the Buddha teaching any theory of collective kamma. MY position is that, in accordance with the Buddha's teachings, the intentional killing of another living being is always unwholesome. Period. If you want to attack this position I will be happy to try to defend it.
2. No doubt the defining characteristic of government is the legitimized use of force. But why the need to try to expand the Dhamma into an all-encompassing philosophical system under which state force would have to be legitimized and resolved?
3. I think Aung San Su Kyi sees clearly enough that if you assume political office where you give an order to kill and someone will follow it, it is indeed an "occupational hazard." Kings and leaders have the ability to make a lot of good karma as well, but they should not try to rationalize, as it appears

that she isn't, that any killing they order is offsetting bad karma. What's the issue here? If Aung San Su Kyi were a nun instead of politician and she said that any of the killing she felt she had to do was actually a virtue, then there's an issue.

4. Your statement that I "seem to say that the Allies were no better morally than the Nazis in their conduct of the war," is a profound distortion of my argument. Your standard for "just war" was a subjective belief by a soldier that his "purpose is to block the murderous campaign of a ruthless tyrant?" My argument was that given the relentless propaganda and misinformation the German population were subjected to, many or most of them "with their world view twisted and perverted by relentless propaganda, [subjectively] thought they were defending their country." And that therefore your standard, if it were sufficient justification in this extreme case, could be used to justify both sides in almost any war. I would be interested to hear a defense of your standard for "just war" against my actual argument.

5. "I really wonder whether the Buddha, if he were alive in 1939-41..." What is your basis for assuming that genocidal maniacs have not existed throughout human history, that the Buddha, who comprehended the karma of beings throughout his past lives and the potentials of the human mind far beyond our present abilities, was unaware of this, and that, when he laid out the precept against killing over and over again without revising it throughout the long span of his teaching career, knew it was situational, yet never in one instance gave any guiding corollary for breaking it, nor even a hint that there might be a proper occasion for breaking it?

5. "I tend to take the moral directives of the texts as general rules, intrinsically valid but not unconditional absolutes." This seems to be the key to your whole position, so if possible would you mind terribly unpacking it a bit in simple language.

With all due respect.

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 21, 2014, 1:19 am

OneVoice wrote "What a waste of time. Shall we carry on?"

I agree, OneVoice, that this has become a waste of time. I could rebut your first five points one by one (the sixth one is asking Bhikkha Bodhi to elaborate); however, it would only add fuel to what has become a fool's fire.

Shall we carry on? No. Our differences cannot be reconciled.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 2:35 am

I am not opposing the promulgation of this pernicious view solely for the participants in this thread, clearly. I want to make sure there is an alternative view based in the Dhamma, not on a worldly paradigm, present everywhere Bhikkhu Bodhi tries to fob it off. You don't have to carry on, but I will. Now I am rebutting your five points one by one. :)

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Reply by [wsking](#) on August 21, 2014, 12:06 pm

Dear One View:

I didn't say you were a Hefalump! I said I fell into your Hefalump trap! That means I am the Hefalump. Didn't you ever read Winnie the Pooh? A Hefalump is a kind of imaginary elephant. A Hefalump trap catches Hefalumps. I fall into your Hefalump trap because I don't see it coming, and because your reasoning is too quick for my plodding approach. You should be laughing about this! It was a compliment!

As was the remark that you play the necessary Devil's Advocate and function like Shariputra and Subhuti in the sutras. All compliments to your oppositional tacks in all your responses. They bring about good discussions and cause us to think more deeply. Well done! However, a word of correction on your tone from a friend is more precious than gold. You are insulting....it's hard to engage with you because of that. Can you

present in a different way, or wait until the urge to do it passes?

Gassho!

\_/\\_

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Reply by [wsking](#) on August 21, 2014, 2:17 pm

Dear Bhikkhu Bodhi and One View,

Venerable Geshe Ngawang Dargey was the first Tibetan lama to teach westerners in Dharamsala in a class we had at the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives. He was a Gelukpa geshe of the highest rank assigned to us by His Holiness. We were the first class of westerners they ever taught. We were very, very fortunate. Geshe-la passed away a long time ago in New Zealand, around 1985, I think.

Ven. Bhikkhu, Geshe-la never mentioned national or international politics. When Geshe-la taught the precepts, he was talking about personal practice.

He was wonderful. I miss him, I love him, I hope to see him again someday. We were like a pile of puppies, and he saved all of us. He made us into decent people. Tears....when I think of the kindness of the guru. He literally gave his life for us. I hope so much that we are all worth it. Practice! Don't be lazy! That's what he always said, Practice!

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 20, 2014, 12:59 am

OneVoice,

Below are excerpts from the Buddha in the Pali Canon. The Canon suggests that the Buddha told the Kālāmas not to go . . . by a collection of texts . . . The Canon suggests that the Buddha told the Kālāmas, essentially, to go by the knowledge attained by their own experience instead of any canon, or indeed, even his own or any other teacher's word (the Pali Canon had not been written at the time the Buddha lived, by the way). The Buddha would not have recommended a dogmatic adherence to any "canon," even the Pali Canon.

My experience agrees with Bhikkhu Bodhi's experience in the matter you refer to here.

Incidentally, my experience also verifies that I should avoid killing or exploiting, or contributing to the killing or exploiting of, nonhuman animals as much as is reasonably possible in one's circumstances. "Reasonably possible," the way I take it, is strict and questions "convenient" rationalizations, but takes on the same non-dogmatism and non-absolutism that the Buddha taught and that Bhikkhu Bodhi assumes in his commentary.

Excerpts attributed to the Buddha in the Pali Canon:

"Come, Kālāmas. Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of texts, by logic, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think, 'The ascetic is our teacher.'<sup>4</sup> But when you know for yourselves, 'These things are unwholesome; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; these things, if undertaken and practiced, lead to harm and suffering,' then you should abandon them."

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2005-08-10). In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon (Teachings of the Buddha) (Kindle Locations 1696-1700). Wisdom Publications. Kindle Edition.

"Come, Kālāmas. Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of texts, by logic, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think, 'The ascetic is our teacher.' But when you know for yourselves, 'These things are wholesome; these things are blameless; these things are praised by the wise; these things, if undertaken and practiced, lead to welfare and happiness,' then you should engage in them."

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2005-08-10). In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon (Teachings of the Buddha) (pp. 89-90). Wisdom Publications. Kindle Edition.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 20, 2014, 1:50 am

You have omitted consideration of the lines, "these things are censured by the wise ... these things are praised by the wise." Your understanding of the history of the compilation of the Pali Canon appears deficient.

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 20, 2014, 8:50 am

I had considered those lines. Absolute pacifism -- the kind of pacifism that would rather let thousands or millions of innocents be unnecessarily murdered than to sully their absolute personal adherence to a precept or rule -- is censured by the wise. Reasonable pacifism -- the kind of pacifism that takes nonviolence as far as is reasonably possible under given circumstances, but sees the folly in letting dangerous tyrants and sociopaths murder and severely oppress the innocent majority -- is praised by the wise.

The wise also consider that we do not live in a peaceful anarchic utopia. We live in a world of police and military forces, without which we would likely be ruled by a local, intolerant thug. The wise do not forget that their peace advocacy -- even while they censure the military and police who protect their legal right to protest -- is protected by the violence, or threat of violence, of the military and police against tyrannical others who would condemn them to a choice of silence and oppression, or torture and death.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 20, 2014, 8:19 pm

You justify the intentional killing of others based on what is reasonable in the context of your world view. The Buddha of the Pali Canon makes no allowances for this. If you think his teaching on this basic point is unwise you have every right to disregard it.

Because of Bhikkhu Bodhi's ordination and status as a senior Theravada Buddhist teacher, however, and because of his close association with the Pali Canon, the situation is different. Whether he recognizes or admits it, he represents Theravada Buddhism. His attempt to create a Buddhist doctrine of "just war" is without any basis in the Pali Canon and the entire history of Theravada Buddhist doctrine, as he openly (to his credit) admits. This is why he resorts to the U.N. Charter, the military adventures of Asian kings, and a false imputation of approval from apolitical Buddhist monks to support his position. So his invention and promulgation of a doctrine of "just war" without clearly separating himself from the Theravada tradition is irresponsible and disrespectful of the tradition he represents and from which he derives his status and authority, and a source of confusion and doubt for western Buddhists now and into the future. What if a board member of Greenpeace were publicly campaigning for extracting all the tar sands out of Alberta? Clearly s/he doesn't share the values of the rest of the organization, and Greenpeace would have the right to protest that he doesn't speak for them in the least. If s/he were a private citizen or a lobbyist for a petrol company, while the view might still be wrong and harmful, s/he would have a perfect right to promote it.

If Bhikkhu Bodhi is unwilling to renounce this doctrine of "just war", he must find a way to make it absolutely clear, for the record, and for future generations, that his views do not represent and cannot be reconciled with Theravada Buddhism.

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 21, 2014, 1:37 am

OneVoice wrote: "You justify the intentional killing of others based on what is reasonable in the context of your world view."

And you, OneVoice, justify the killing of others based on the context of your world view. The Buddha of the Pali Canon makes no allowances for this. If you think his teaching on this basic point is unwise you, OneVoice, have every right to disregard it.

You see, OneVoice, we disagree about what the Buddha taught and how the Buddha would apply it today. We also disagree about the morality of letting mass murder happen without intervention (having good reasons that intervention will succeed in reducing murder and suffering). You think it's fine; I think it's wrong. You say the Buddha would be fine with allowing extreme violence against innocents (especially against thousands or millions) to go unchecked without necessary intervention, prevention, or mitigation (including violence necessary to do so). I disagree. Our differences appear to be irreconcilable.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 2:46 am

There seems to be a mix-up of agency related to kamma. That when somebody else kills somebody the killing is my kamma and when I kill somebody that kamma not the kamma of killing. I encourage any readers of these threads to explore the Pali Canon for themselves, including even Bhikkhu Bodhi's translations. This is not a question of he said she said. The Canon is quite clear and not open to such wildly differentiating interpretations. Decide for yourself.

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Reply by [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#) on August 20, 2014, 3:47 pm

Very good points, Candor. In this respect we can consider as "the wise" the moral philosophers and experts in international jurisprudence who have long agonized over the criteria of a just war and just police action, and who have incorporated these criteria into the UN Charter and other international agreements. Though Buddhist fundamentalists tend to dismiss them as "mere secular humanists," this, firstly, is not true because many of them are people of religious faith; and second because these thinkers institute such protocols, not to advance any self-interested agenda, but to lay down the most stringent criteria possible for the instigation and conduct of war while not utterly ruling this out as a final resort for preventing, as you put it, "dangerous tyrants and sociopaths from murdering and severely oppressing the innocent majority." Naturally, there are many shades of opinion about the exact conditions that can justify war, but serious ethical thinkers without preset agendas recognize that the advocacy of uncompromising pacificism is morally pernicious. See in this respect Elizabeth Anscombe's essay, "War and Murder." <http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/rameson/Anscombe.pdf>

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 21, 2014, 1:39 am

Agreed, Bhikkhu Bodhi, and thank you for the link. Moral philosophy has been of great interest to me over the past decade.

I'll also take this opportunity to thank you for your indispensable work in the compilation and translation (through several volumes) of the Discourses of the Buddha. Living in a rural area, they are my primary and most essential resource for practice. Your work is deeply appreciated!

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 20, 2014, 4:28 pm

Since you consider the "moral philosophers and experts in international jurisprudence ... agonized ... UN Charter ...[and whatnot]" to be "the wise." And since you consider only those who "recognize that ... uncompromising pacifism is morally pernicious" to be "serious ethical thinkers." And since the views of these lawyers and diplomats are in direct, irreconcilable conflict with those of the Buddha. I am forced to conclude that you do not consider the Buddha to be wise or a serious ethical thinker. Do you, perchance, happen to see any conflict in your views and your position as an ordained monk and teacher in the Theravada tradition?

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 21, 2014, 12:57 am

You have no basis for claiming that the views of the moral philosophers and experts in international jurisprudence are in conflict with the Buddha's views, since the Buddha provided no guidance on international jurisprudence. To extrapolate from the Pali Canon or the Buddha's commentary on ancient, local politics and battles of his era to what the Buddha would say about today's geopolitical issues is, at best, specious, and at worst, foolish.

It is clear the Bhikkhu Bodhi disagrees with your view on what the Buddha would think about the position of absolute pacifism regarding today's geopolitical issues (I also disagree with you), so your assumption that he agrees with you on this point makes your "conclusion" that Bhikkhu Bodhi does "not consider the Buddha to be wise or a serious ethical thinker" completely fail as a plausible argument.

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Reply by [wsking](#) on August 21, 2014, 4:21 am

Thank you!

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 2:08 am

If the moral philosophers and experts in international jurisprudence (i.e. lawyers) justify the intentional taking of a beings life under any circumstances, then they are in conflict with the Buddha's views expressed in the Pali Canon and the Theravada Tradition. This is simply a fact. You make the argument basically that "times have changed," so the Buddha's times can't apply to today's events. But the Buddha described his own teachings as "akaliko" or timeless. Maybe we have iPhones now or fighter jets, but avarice, hatred and delusion in the human heart are of the same character. So, you may be right, but there is no basis in the Pali Canon or the Theravada tradition for saying the Dhamma needs an update.

This is why Bhikkhu Bodhi is the one with no basis for presenting this view AS A THERAVADA BUDDHIST VIEW. Sorry for the all-caps. By not clearly separating his view from the tradition he represents by virtue of the robes he wears, he is unilaterally associating the tradition, and all (or at least the vast majority and certainly the official view) the other monks and nuns in it, with what they consider to be a most pernicious and illegitimate view.

I don't know where you got the idea of "absolute pacifism." Wherever you



got that idea, you've been misled. Of course, the argument for the indispensability of intentional killing works a lot better when the only alternative is abject pacifism. The Buddha's said intentionally taking the life of another living being was always unwholesome, but he didn't say you couldn't resist, even including violent resistance if necessary. You can shoot them in the legs to prevent them from making bad karma for themselves, blow up infrastructure, organize mass strikes, whatever. There are myriad creative options between abject surrender and intentionally killing somebody. This fact seems to get erased from consideration.

The Buddha's mission was to provide a real refuge from suffering that people could absolutely rely on. From a worldly point of view, where saving people's lives might seem to be of paramount importance, the Buddha's teachings may appear to be incomplete in that he provided "no guidance on international jurisprudence." I believe you are correct in saying that this is also Bhikkhu Bodhi's view and that he presumes to fill the gap with his theories on "just war." All I can do is to try to suggest to you to maybe not be so decided that your present world view already comprehends the whole picture. One of the amazing things about the Dhamma is that as you practice your perspective can change in radical ways. If the Dhamma just reinforced what we already thought we knew, it wouldn't be anything worth respecting. I encourage you to re-read the perspective of the Tibetan monk that wsking posted, and maybe just consider how it is that he could say what he said, and why it seems so inspiring.

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 21, 2014, 3:23 am

In full disclosure (those who have read a lot of my posts on Tricycle would already know this), I don't accept Buddhist cosmology, specifically karma and rebirth. But if I did, I could see how keeping one's personal karma as pure and wholesome as possible might be of utmost importance. It might therefore be far better, personally, to be killed than to kill. In this world view, absolute abstention from killing, and even absolute pacifism, might be wholesome and prudent. (But there might be problems with this killing=bad karma theory; see the last paragraph in this comment.)

Whether it would be better, in terms of one's personal karma (an issue I'm unconcerned with), to advocate for absolute avoidance of war \*no matter what the costs to others,\* or to be more reasonable by claiming that some circumstances may be costly enough (to others!) to justify war, I don't know. Nothing I've read or learned in Buddhism (Theravadin or other) seems clear on this.

One thing that confuses me, though, is that if continuous karma through rebirth is true, why is death a big deal? And if death is not a big deal because of rebirth, then why is killing a big deal? It seems that if one keeps one's karma from rebirth A to rebirth B, then it is similar, if not identical, in karmic terms, to taking a nap! (I realize that one is now a different person (person and sentient being are identical to me), but so what?) Killing is karmically like giving someone a sleeping pill. So why would the Buddha have such a big problem with killing, per se? It seems like no serious harm, no serious foul.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 10:07 pm

Generally beings desperately cling to life and the act of ripping it away from them can be the cause of tremendous suffering. Also, who wants to go through secondary school again. :) With regard to human beings, in the Buddhist cosmology a human birth is rare, and rarer still, the opportunity to practice the Dhamma. There's no telling due to the karmic mix of the victim whether they're going to hell or an animal rebirth (how they suffer) how many times before they have the chance at a human life and the possibilities to end suffering it provides. So it could be a great loss, the

catalyst for a lot of suffering.

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 21, 2014, 11:01 pm

Yes, dying, or the immediate probability of dying, runs counter to instinct. Death, otoh, and as Epicurus said, is nothing to us.

It seems to me that if one had the relatively happy kamma to be born human once, it's likely to happen again. Given the population explosion of humans over the past 150 years, it seems average kamma is increasing. Although given that humans intentionally slaughter 56 billion land animals annually, and hundreds of billions more water animals annually, maybe the kammic flux is just drastically increasing in amplitude. That is, humans torture and slaughter animals in this life, pay for it so severely as animals tortured and killed by humans in the next life that they earn a kammic return to human life, only to do the same thing over and over in a cycle of perpetual idiocy. That would be a profound tragicomedy, and all-too-human, if true!

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 22, 2014, 11:01 am

There is nothing which expressly limits the cycle to this planet, universe, dimension or whatnot. The dynamics of your tragicomedy are essentially correct, however, only that the exchange might not be one animal life to one human life. Also there are other levels of existence, both higher and lower, assumed in the cosmology.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 11:24 am

Thank you for the full disclosure. You hold what is referred to in the Canon as an "annihilationist view," simply that there is no rebirth or kammic effects after death. That is not uncommon, and there is nothing Dhammic about forcing people to believe what they don't. This is why I said before that given your world view, your view on this issue might make sense, depending empirically whether stopping killing by killing really resulted in less killing. My concern, however, is whether it is legitimate to present a doctrine of "just war" as if it were harmonious with the Pali Canon and Theravada doctrine. It is impossible to read the Canon without being struck by the absolute centrality and pervasiveness of the concepts of kamma and rebirth, explicit and implied, in all of the Buddha's discourses. This is why I have referred to Bhikkhu Bodhi's doctrine of "just war" as worldly and not Buddhist, because it also seems based on a paradigm similar to yours in which the preservation of bodily life is of paramount and deciding importance. He, like you, is perfectly free to believe what he wants and to say what he wants, but NOT when, due to his position, he is seen as one of the foremost Theravada Buddhist representatives in the West. I don't think it's impossible to imagine the sense of violation and betrayal of other monks, nuns and serious lay practitioners, to have what they consider, justifiably, to be a completely antithetical distortion of the Dhamma being unilaterally associated with their tradition. I agree with you that we will have to agree to disagree about our interpretations of Buddhism and whether state sponsored killing leads to more or less bloodshed in the long run. But I wonder if you can see why Bhikkhu Bodhi is out of line in promulgating this view given his standing despite the fact that you agree with it.

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 21, 2014, 3:16 pm

I often read books, essays and articles separating, discarding, and synthesizing what I read. I extract the secular philosophical and psychological aspects of Buddhism and synthesize them with non-Buddhist philosophy, science, and psychology to form a consistent web of belief. This is why it's easy for me to ignore the Buddha's world view regarding kamma and rebirth, regardless of its centrality in the Canon or anywhere else.

As for whether I can see that Bhikkhu Bodhi is "out of line" with Theravadin Buddhism, I can't. However, I'm not an expert on this topic. I would be very interested to see whether you or him have the majority of monks and nuns on your side in this particular issue. If the vast majority were to agree with you on this topic, then Bhikkhu Bodhi would have to come up with a very compelling reason why the vast majority are simply confused or ignorant.

I suspect, though, that this topic might be heavily debated among monks and nuns (more like 50/50), in which case I'd remain in agreement with Bhikkhu Bodhi.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 22, 2014, 11:25 am

I can't present direct proof to the contrary, but I would like to correct what I believe to be an erroneous assumption on your part: "that this topic might be heavily debated among monks and nuns (more like 50/50)." My sense is that this is about as hotly debated as Creationism would be at a Harvard biology lab. You will notice that not once has Bhikkhu Bodhi marshaled any support for his doctrine of "just war" from the Pali Canon, from Theravada Commentaries or Sub-commentaries, from statements, books or talks from any other Theravada monks in Asia or the West. The totality of his argument rests on his views of political history, "common sense," other Buddhist traditions (the Dalai Lama), Asian kings, etc. If you want to find out for yourself you might make an informal survey by calling a sampling of Theravada monasteries around America and posing the question: Does the Buddha Dhamma approve of intentionally killing somebody to prevent them from killing somebody else? And then on a mass scale? Or however you feel Bhikkhu Bodhi's "just war" theory is accurately summarized.

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 22, 2014, 11:20 pm

Perhaps you're correct about it being a resolved issue among monks and nuns in your side's favor. If I were to survey a statistically valid sample of monks and nuns, however, I would put the question closer to the terms Bhikkhu Bodhi did, which allow for the cost of promoting strict pacifism for large populations of liberal democracies capitulating to war-loving, totalitarian regimes hellbent on forcing the world to comply with their political or religious ideology, however intolerant, murderous, and oppressive.

Please keep in mind that none of the recent wars fought have qualified for a deeply regrettable pass, with the possible exception of the Gulf War and WWII, with both having had widespread international consensus for the precise reason that the totalitarian ideologues seriously threatened international security, AND military action was likely to succeed, and if fact, did succeed.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 23, 2014, 12:02 am

You are welcome to put it any way you like. I also was not suggesting or requiring it be statistically valid, etc., just whatever was enough to convince you. I tried to keep my summary of his position short and (un)sweet because 1. most monks and nuns aren't as up on international politics as Bhikkhu Bodhi, and 2. some of them might speak English only as a second language.

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 23, 2014, 8:10 am

Statistically valid would convince me. I don't think one needs to be up on international politics to answer such a question, provided enough context is given in the question(s). I'd be happy to have a translator.

But it's moot anyway, because, although I'd be very interested, I'm not interested enough to put in the substantial time and effort it would require to do a convincing study.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 23, 2014, 12:02 am

You are welcome to put it any way you like. I also was not suggesting or requiring it be statistically valid, etc., just whatever was enough to convince you. I tried to keep my summary of his position short and (un)sweet because 1. most monks and nuns aren't as up on international politics as Bhikkhu Bodhi, and 2. some of them might speak English only as a second language.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 6:16 pm

Here is an eloquent explanation of the orthodox Theravada view of the first precept:

One more word should be added concerning the formulation of the precepts. Despite their negative wording, even in that form the precepts are productive of tremendous positive benefits for others as well as for oneself. The Buddha says that one who abstains from the destruction of life gives immeasurable safety and security to countless living beings. How the simple observance of a single precept leads to such a result is not immediately obvious but calls for some thought. Now by myself I can never give immeasurable safety and security to other beings by any program of positive action. Even if I were to go on protest against all the slaughterhouses in the world, or to march against war continuously without stopping, by such action I could never stop the slaughter of animals or ensure that war would come to an end. But when I adopt for myself the precept to abstain from the destruction of life, then by reason of the precept I do not intentionally destroy the life of any living being. Thus any other being can feel safe and secure in my presence; all beings are ensured that they will never meet harm from me. Of course even then I can never ensure that other living beings will be absolutely immune from harm and suffering, but this is beyond anyone's power. All that lies within my power and the sphere of my responsibility are the attitudes and actions that emanate from myself towards others. And as long as these are circumscribed by the training rule to abstain from taking life, no living being need feel threatened in my presence, or fear that harm and suffering will come from me. -- Bhikkhu Bodhi

The full explanation of all the precepts can be found here:

<http://www.accesstosight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel282.html>

For just the first precept, here:

<http://www.accesstosight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel282.html#prec2>

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Reply by [candor](#) on August 21, 2014, 8:21 pm

Thanks for the links. I'll check them out.

This also describes how I live my life in practice, and mostly in theory and attitude. For example, I don't possess any weapons; I'm a vegan (and have been for a long time).

But I also realize that the reason I can live in comfort and easily refrain from exploitation and intentional violence is that I live in an area of the world where I don't need to concern myself much with self defense, in large part due to adequate police and military protection. I consider it a luxury that has a hidden cost.

As much as I'd like to be perfectly peaceful, gray areas are omnipresent. I cannot be purely peaceful when I pay taxes to governments that use violence as a means of protection, or even when I live as a citizen protected by those governments. It's the same with being a vegan. I can't pay taxes or participate in the economy in any significant way without purity being sacrificed.

I don't like these gray areas, but I accept them as part of living in a violent world and as an interconnected member of a generally violent species. I'd rather the violence inflicted for my protection and well being be indirect than direct.

I understand that none of the above has much, if anything, to do with your complaint against Bhikkhu Bodhi. I just want to point out that if Theravadin monks and nuns think they live purely, they don't, unless they're living self-sufficiently as vegans in a remote and mostly safe area of the world, independent of a modern economy, without police or military to protect them.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 21, 2014, 9:44 pm

At least from the monks and nuns I've had contact with, they are fully aware that it's impossible to be completely harmless. According to the Dhamma as long as you keep being reborn, there's some harm, as beings basically feed on other beings, and that the only possibility of absolute harmlessness is to attain Nibbana and end the cycle of rebirth. I know this is a different paradigm from yours but it has its own internal coherence.

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Reply by [philboyd](#) on August 17, 2014, 8:04 am

The dynamics of global restructuring are beyond my comprehension. It seems to me, simply putting an end to fiat money would go a long way toward a more ethical society.

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Reply by [wsking](#) on August 17, 2014, 3:00 pm

May I ask, please, what do you mean by "fiat money" and how is it used? Thanks.  
Gassho

\_!/?\_

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Reply by [philboyd](#) on August 17, 2014, 5:04 pm

Fiat money is currency that has its value based on arbitrary ideas rather than physical commodities. Today the value of the U.S. dollar is based on debt. This means, literally, that if all debts were paid there would be no money in circulation. If we used money value based on physical commodities, governments could not leverage large scale wars, there would be no too big to fail, banking would be local, inflation would be supply and demand oriented to cite some of the positive outcomes I believe we would experience. In regard to how this would cultivate a more ethical society : because money merchants would be held more accountable (not counting debt as an asset but rather a liability) a self governing influence would necessarily become a factor in all business from personal to corporate to government.

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Reply by [philboyd](#) on August 17, 2014, 5:04 pm

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 15, 2014, 4:59 pm

I'm glad to hear Bhikkhu Bodhi "bluntly repudiate the culture of death." This is completely at odds with his appalling recent article in Inquiring Mind advocating the intentional killing of people in wartime under certain circumstances and calling it a "Buddhist Perspective." A blunt repudiation of his own position in that article would be an excellent contribution he could make to "a culture committed to the real enhancement of life." At the very least he should admit that his position is based solely on his own standards and not on the Buddha's Dhamma in any way. I will leave it to someone more eloquent to hopefully comment on the dangers of monks involving themselves in political movements generally.

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Reply by [wsking](#) on August 17, 2014, 5:59 pm

Hi, OneView, Just some thoughts, if I may offer them, on intentional killing in wartime:

In a democracy, every policy that affects the general welfare is the responsibility of all of us, and that includes monastics. As precedence, we have Father Thomas Merton, who while a contemplative Trappist monk vowed to silence, actively engaged through his writings during the sixties. It is kind and generous on Bhikhu Bodhi's part to leave the peace of meditation and scholarship and step into the fray, to engage in this discussion, to share his great learning and perspective on these issues from a Buddhist point of view.

Bodhisattva and Tantric vows allow the breaking of vows in extreme cases to help to lead others to Enlightenment and out of suffering.

Buddhism does recognize the duties of a king to maintain the safety and welfare of the kingdom on every level. It recognizes the importance of having a wise and skillful general to protect the country and punish evil-doers. Bodhisattva teachings recognize the stopping of, or merciful killing of, one who intends great harm to others. Buddhism



recognizes that what looks like a human body may actually not be human, but harbor a demonic and evil spirit of many types.

Two years ago in Atlanta, Georgia at Emory University, I heard His Holiness respond to a question of this sort. A SWAT team officer arose from the audience, introduced himself, and said he was a devout Christian who often worried about what the Lord Jesus would say about his work which involved taking organized violent action to kill people who posed a danger to the community. Since His Holiness was both a spiritual leader and the ruler of a country, he would surely understand this predicament. What was his feeling about such work?

His Holiness answered, saying, "Yes, I understand how you feel. It's very difficult. So think like this: First: motivation is to protect the innocent people from these violent crazy ones, isn't it? Second: the individual is suffering terribly from the mental imbalance and everyone can see that suffering. So, compassionate heart. Third, the karma affects countless lifetimes and from that stand point, saving the person from committing the karma is a compassionate act. So, seeing the sickness, the mental imbalance, act with compassion to protect that crazy individual and the community.

To protect is Christian loving kindness. Thinking that way, you can do your job without hesitation. It is a blessing and protection for everyone and we thank you. Motivation is the main thing. You act! Don't hesitate! "

So, I think from these examples we can see that while we should not kill, from the point of view of the safety of the country and the society, there are times when it is necessary. At that time, the motivation is compassion, and we should be careful that we do not allow the mind the negative karma of rejoicing in the killing, instead feeling sadness and regret, praying for the person who was in such a terrible state.

From the ultimate point of view there is no self-existent person, no action, and no self-existent result. From the karmic point of view intention, motivation, completion, and dedication are the most important things to check-up on.

Every other avenue should be exhausted before violent action is taken or vows are broken. That includes using time, place, and distance to some extent to help resolve the situations. Many situations can be dissolved just by waiting a little, by isolating the problem, by setting the problem or the victims at some distance.

Just think of Waco: everything could have turned out differently if we had simply waited for the groceries and diapers to run out, for drivers licenses to be renewed, or by turning off the electricity and water. Just by waiting, or just by backing off and leaving for the time being, many lives could have been saved. It would have been easy to arrest during a grocery run to town. But impatience, power and conceit could not wait. We committed a terrible, terrible sin in our love for fire and explosions, forgetting that there were gentle people with gentle misguided hearts within. These are useful lessons for the future.

We can do better. Sometimes a gentler approach will also accomplish our goals. The present situation of government oversight is becoming more and more violent and we are all in danger because of it. This cannot continue. They serve us, not the other way around. However, the pressure they work under cannot be underestimated. Personally, I used to wonder why archangels carried flaming swords and wore shield and buckler. Then I taught high school...now I understand!

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Reply by [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#) on August 17, 2014, 7:27 pm

Thank you, WSKing, for correctly representing my position, which was distorted by OneVoice. My point of view corresponds closely with that of the Dalai Lama, except that I was writing about international affairs rather than about a violent deranged individual within society. My viewpoint is also in accord with the UN Charter's principles on warfare, which I referenced in the essay. Let me cite here relevant excerpts from the essay, so readers are not misled into thinking that I advocate killing as a matter of general policy.

"Governments obtain their legitimacy in part from their ability to protect their citizens from ruthless aggressors bent on conquering their territory and subjugating their populations. The global community as well, through conventions and the mediation of international bodies, seeks to preserve a relative state of peace—however imperfect—from those who would use force to fulfill their lust for power or impose an ideological agenda. When a nation violates the rules of peaceful coexistence, the obligation to restrain aggression may trump the obligation to avoid violence. The UN Charter sees physical force as the last choice, but condones its use when allowing the transgressor to proceed unchecked would have more disastrous consequences.... Suppose I travel back in time to the 1940s when Hitler is pursuing his quest for global domination. If I join a combat unit, is my participation in this war to be considered morally reprehensible though my

purpose is to block the murderous campaign of a ruthless tyrant? Can we say that fidelity to the Dhamma obliges us to remain passive in the face of brute aggression, or to pursue negotiations when it is clear these will only provide the antagonist with a chance to feed his ambitions? Wouldn't we maintain that in this situation military action to stop the aggressor is laudable, even obligatory, and that a soldier's actions can be viewed as morally commendable?"

Remember that I am positing a hypothetical situation where all attempts at peaceful settlement fail and the choice is a stark one between permitting the ruthless slaughter of one's own population (or other innocents) and militarily resisting the aggressor. By citing the UN Charter I indicate that the defensive party to the conflict should use only proportionate force, try to avoid civilian casualties, and end combat operations as soon as possible. These are provisions recognized by almost all authorities on international jurisprudence. Moreover, throughout Buddhist history in almost all Buddhist countries, the Buddhist kings have maintained armies and have used them--sometimes for offensive purposes (in which case they were truly acting contrary to the Dhamma), but most often for defensive purposes and to maintain order within the realm. Yet I have never read of groups of monks protesting against them and insisting that they disarm in order to remain faithful to the Dhamma--nor do I think we should denigrate the sincerity of their faith because they implemented the established duties of kingship. While a perfect fit between the ethical principles of the Dhamma and the moral complexities of the world would be ideal, the plain fact is that the two are in a tense relationship that sometimes requires departures from ideal standards in order to reduce harm and suffering to innocent people. This of course is not a justification for the harsh brutality of contemporary warfare or for American adventurism in the Gulf region, Central Asia, and parts of Africa.

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Reply by [OneVoice](#) on August 18, 2014, 6:52 pm

With all due respect you have leveled a blanket accusation that I have distorted your position. What I said was that you were "advocating the intentional killing of people in wartime under certain circumstances and calling it a 'Buddhist Perspective.'" This still appears to be a correct summary of your position in all respects. I also said your position was based on your "own standards and not on the Buddha's Dhamma in any way." This I thought was an accurate statement given that in your original article you openly admitted there was no support for your position in the Pali Canon. I did not foresee that you might consider Vajrayana doctrine, the military adventures of Asian kings, the silence of non-political monks, and international law to be the "Dhamma" supporting your position. I would be interested to know if this is indeed the basis of your view that I distorted your position.

I read your post carefully and I would like to respond as best I can. Because your position seems to inhabit a secular paradigm, rather than enter into it I thought it would more beneficial to address the various false and non-Dhamma-context assumptions supporting the paradigm. At least this is a way to proceed. The false assumptions are:

1. that the Dalai Lama is an authority on the precept against killing or the Pali Canon for Theravada Buddhists. The Vajrayana has long had a doctrine of "justified killing" and their understanding of the Pali Canon is informed and colored by later foundational texts which they hold in higher regard.
2. that the UN Charter or international jurisprudence is authoritative for Theravada Buddhists (especially when it contradicts the consistent and pervasive teachings of the Buddha in the Pali Canon).
3. that a soldier's joining a combat unit (i.e. killing or trying to kill others) is "morally commendable" if his intention is to block murderous campaigns or brute aggression. The German populace in the 1930's was subjected to relentless propaganda about the victimization and impoverishment of Germany by external elements, of being balkanized, of being overrun by hordes of Slavs, and that German speaking peoples in neighboring countries were being ethnically cleansed. Also Nazi propagandists blamed internal elements, Jewish bankers and industrialists, of robbing and exploiting virtuous German workers. And there was also the blood libel, that Jews kidnapped German children before Passover because they needed the blood of Christian children for their matzah. Before invading Poland the Nazis carried out a false flag event to create the appearance of Polish aggression against Germany and used this to "justify" the invasion of Poland. I bring this up because your international law standard of "just war" naively presupposes that populations and soldiers have access to true and unbiased information about world events when they

Hi there,  
Just wanted to say thanks for your clear comments to this thread.

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Reply by [wsking](#) on August 24, 2014, 1:11 am

You are welcome. Thank you so much for letting me know.  
Gassho  
\_//\_

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- Vajrayana
- Theravada
- Zen (Chan)
- Tibetan
- Nichiren
- Pure Land (Shin)

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- Concentration (dhyana)
- Lovingkindness (metta)
- Generosity
- Chanting
- Koans
- Mindfulness (sati)
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- Compassion
- Devotion
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- Lojong

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